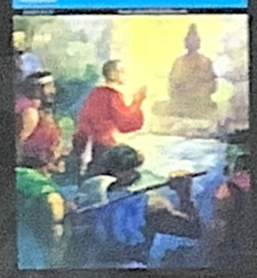
FA HIEN

To learn true wisdom, he traversed bone-dry deserts, scaled snow-laden mountains, and grieved over lost friends. To spread his hard-won knowledge, he battled stormy seas and unimaginable dangers. But his lord's blessings seemed to protect this brave Chinese monk, who spent 15 years retracing the steps of the Buddha and his teachings. Arriving in Gupta-ruled India, Fa Hien kept a record of his travels (between A.D. 399 and 414), which fascinate even to this day.

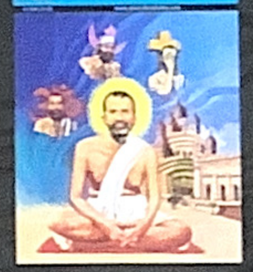
OTHER ACK VISIONARIES:

HIUEN TSANG

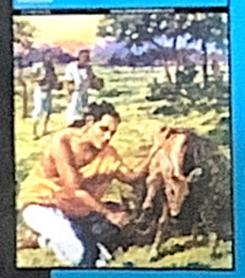


BUDDHA

SRI RAMAKRISHNA



SHANKAR DEV



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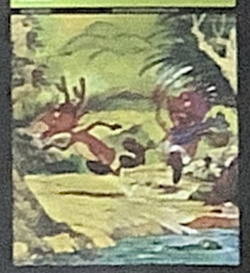

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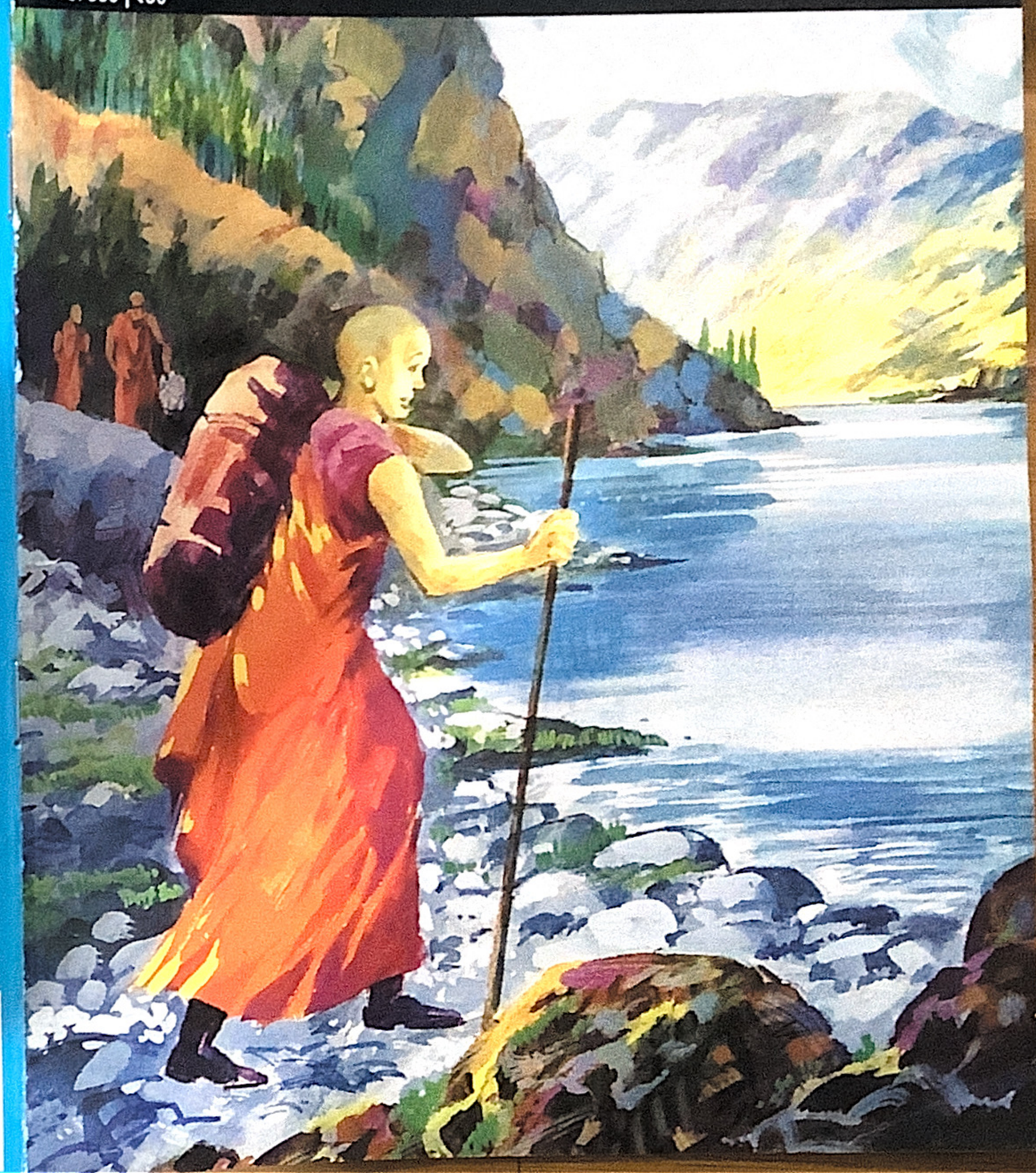


FA HIEN

IN THE SIXTH CENTURY B.C. THERE WAS A GREAT INTELLECTUAL FERMENT AND SPIRITUAL UNREST IN EASTERN INDIA. THINKERS BEGAN TO QUESTION THE PREVALENT RELIGIOUS DOGMAS AND THE VERY BASIS OF RITUALS.

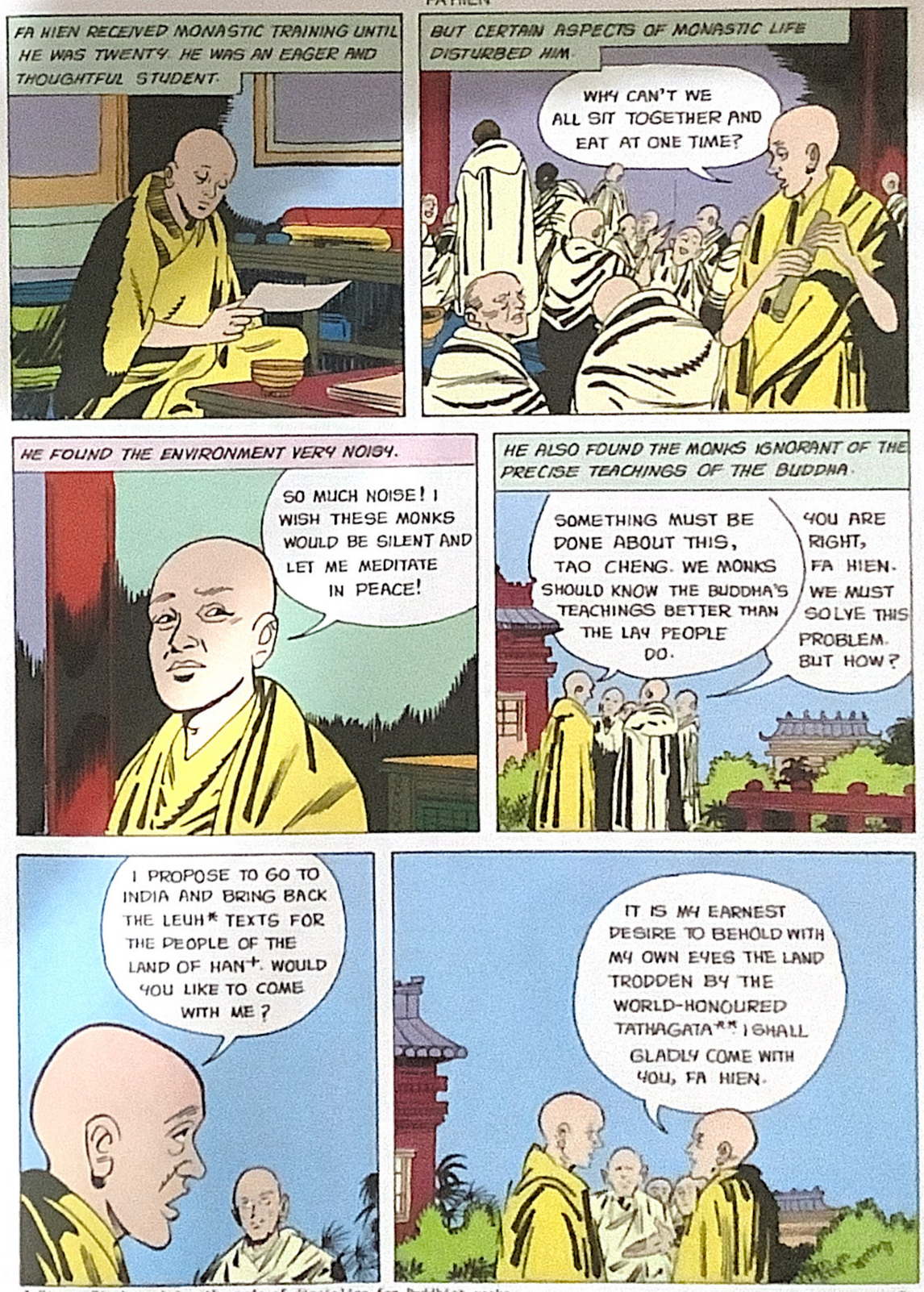
WHY?

SPEARHEADING THIS MOVEMENT WERE BHAGAVAN MAHAVIRA, THE TWENTY-FOURTH TEERTHANKARA* AND BHAGAVAN BUDDHA, THE ENLIGHTENED ONE. THE BUDDHA TAUGHT THAT ALL MISERY SPRANG FROM KAMA (DESIRE) AND ENJOINED PEOPLE TO FOLLOW THE NOBLE EIGHT-FOLD PATH TO BE FREE FROM MISERY.

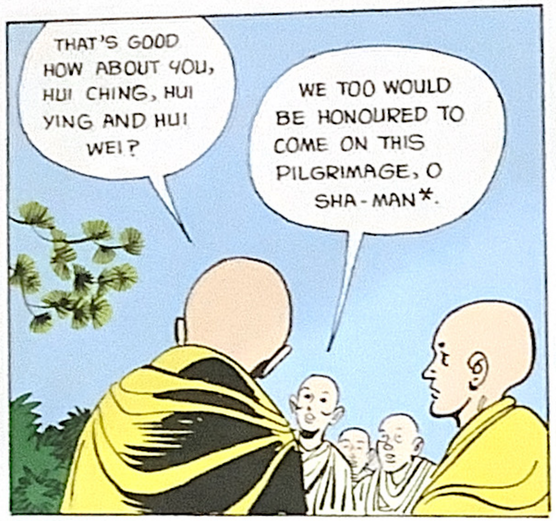
BUDDHAM SARANAM GACHCHHAMI

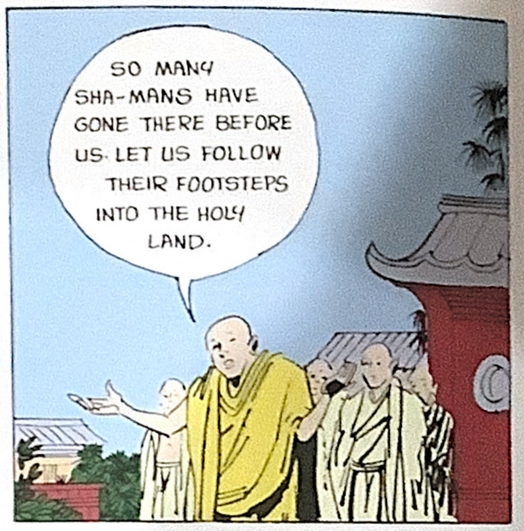
THE EIGHT-FOLD PATH DID NOT CALL UPON THE PEOPLE TO SUBMIT TO VIGOROUS AUSTERITIES AND ITS FOLLOWERS GREW IN NUMBER. ITS MESSAGE OF COMPASSION AND HUMANISM CAPTIVATED THE HEARTS OF MILLIONS ALL OVER ASIA.

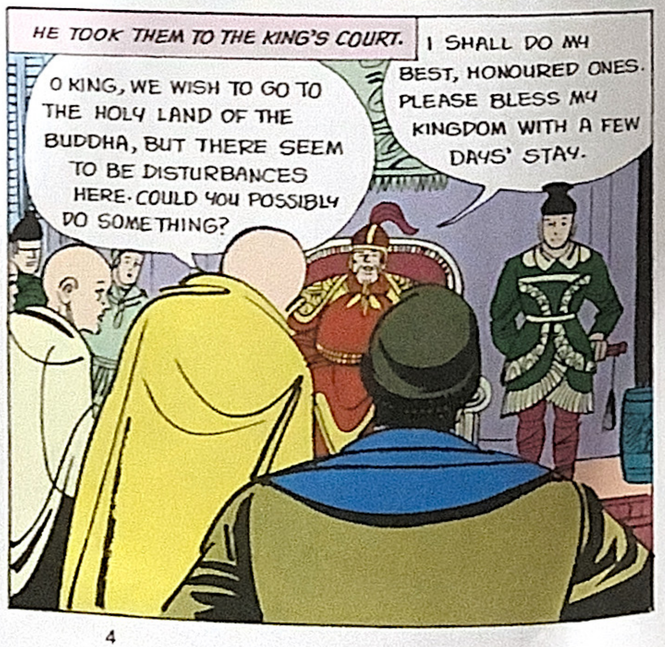
* Jaina saint (literally, a ford maker)



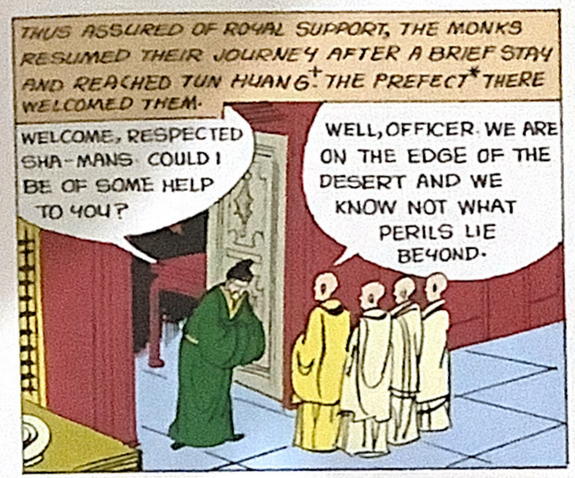
* Vinaya Pitaka, giving the code of discipline for Buddhist monks
\+ China ** Highest epithet given to Buddha. Literally, the one who has arrived

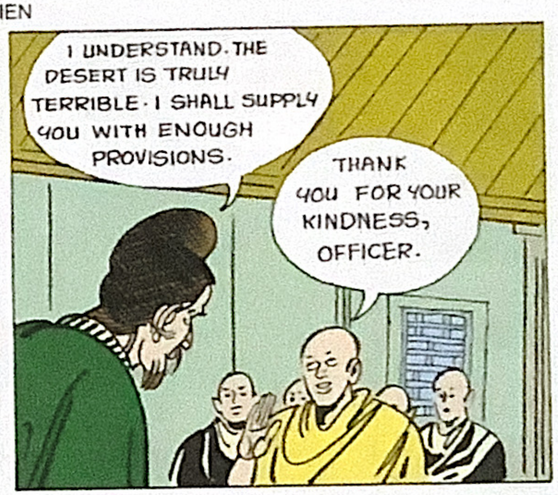


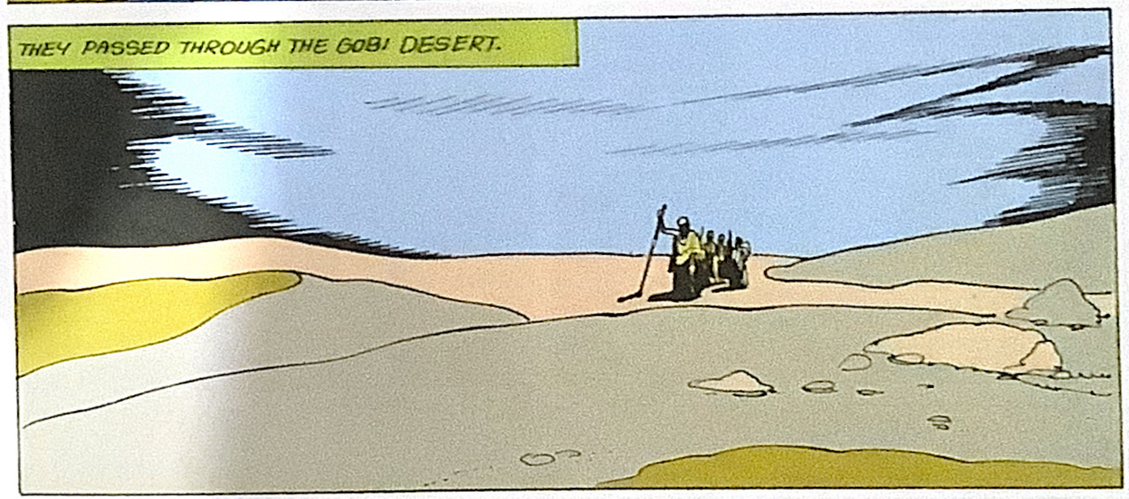


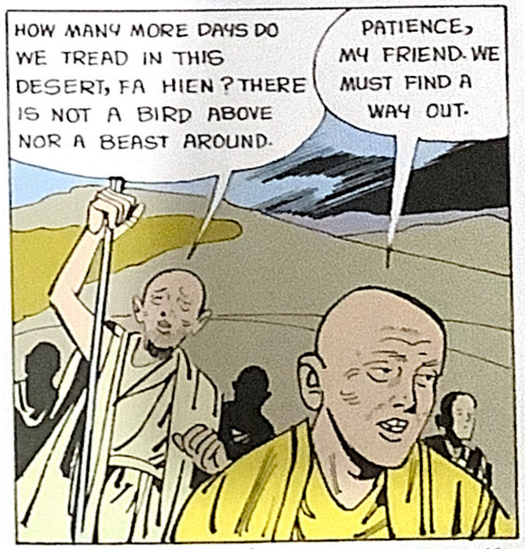


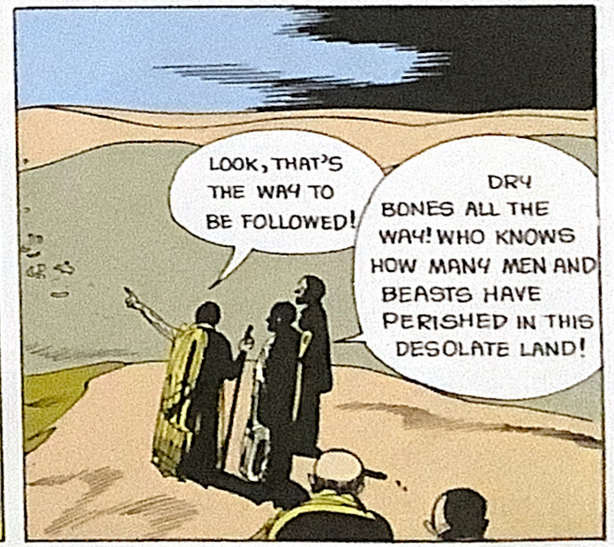
* Shramana, Buddhist (or Jaina) monk





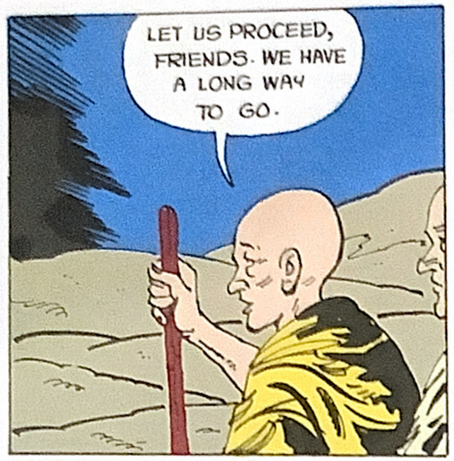


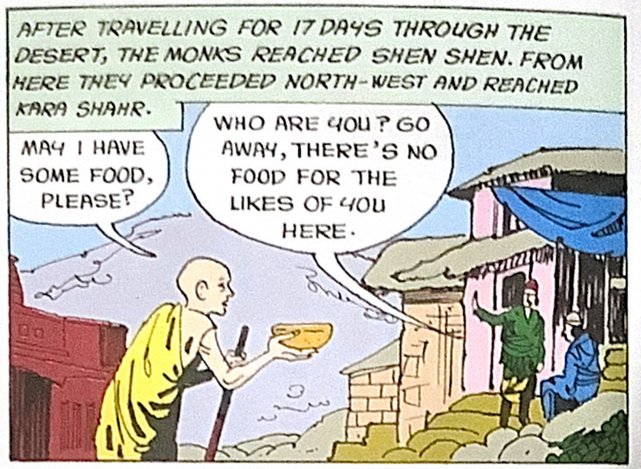


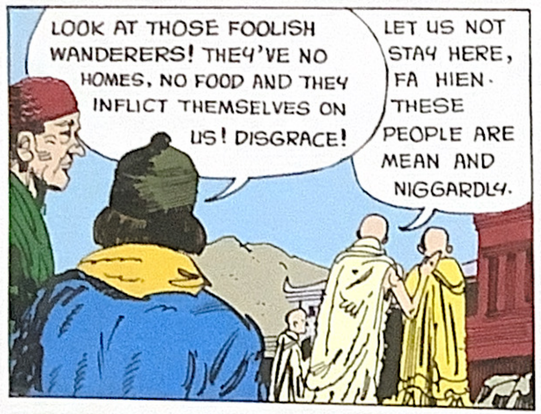


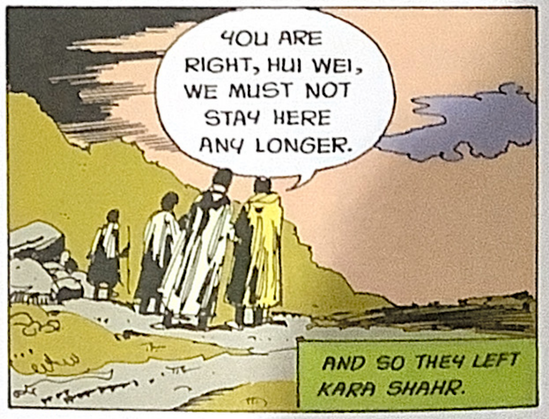
+ See Map on cover page 2

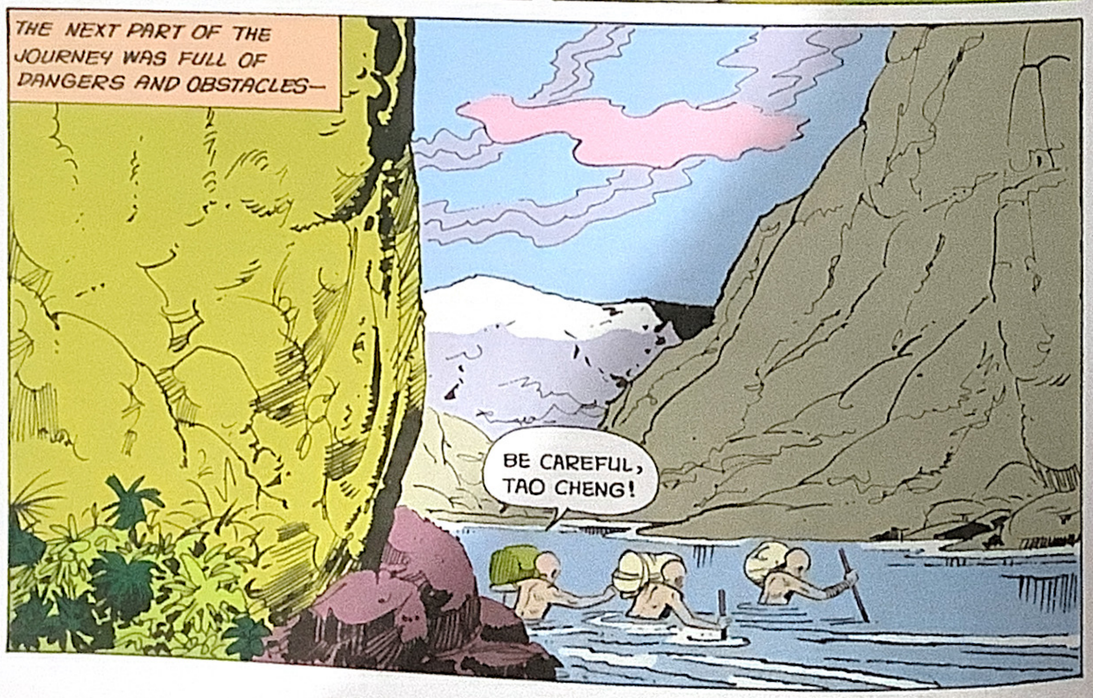
* Administrative officer

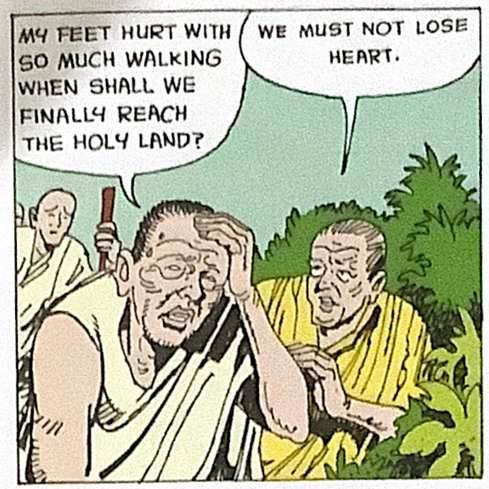

LET US PROCEED, FRIENDS. WE HAVE A LONG WAY TO GO.

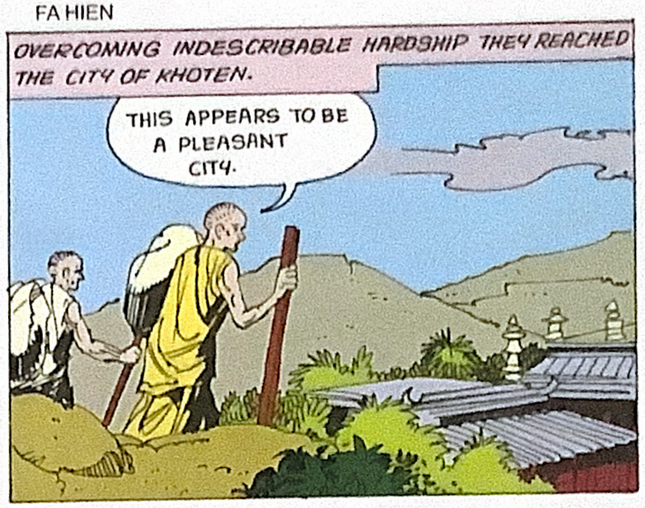

AFTER TRAVELLING FOR 17 DAYS THROUGH THE DESERT, THE MONKS REACHED SHEN SHEN. FROM HERE THEY PROCEEDED NORTH-WEST AND REACHED KARA SHAHR.
MAY I HAVE SOME FOOD, PLEASE?
WHO ARE YOU? GO AWAY, THERE'S NO FOOD FOR THE LIKES OF YOU HERE.


LOOK AT THOSE FOOLISH WANDERERS! THEY'VE NO HOMES, NO FOOD AND THEY INFLICT THEMSELVES ON US! DISGRACE!
LET US NOT STAY HERE, FA HIEN. THESE PEOPLE ARE MEAN AND NIGGARDLY.


YOU ARE RIGHT, HUI WEI, WE MUST NOT STAY HERE ANY LONGER.
AND SO THEY LEFT KARA SHAHR.

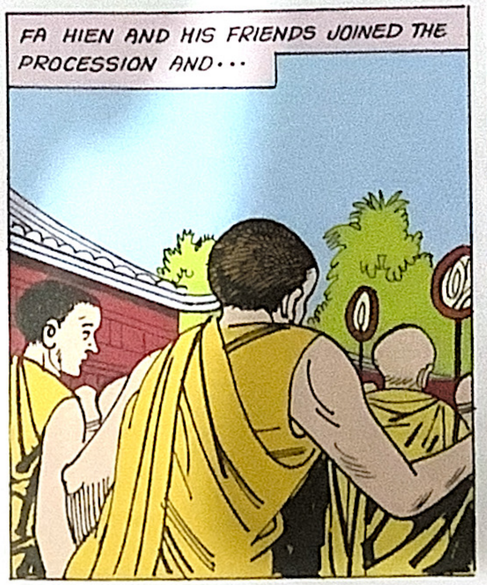

THE NEXT PART OF THE JOURNEY WAS FULL OF DANGERS AND OBSTACLES—
BE CAREFUL, TAO CHENG!

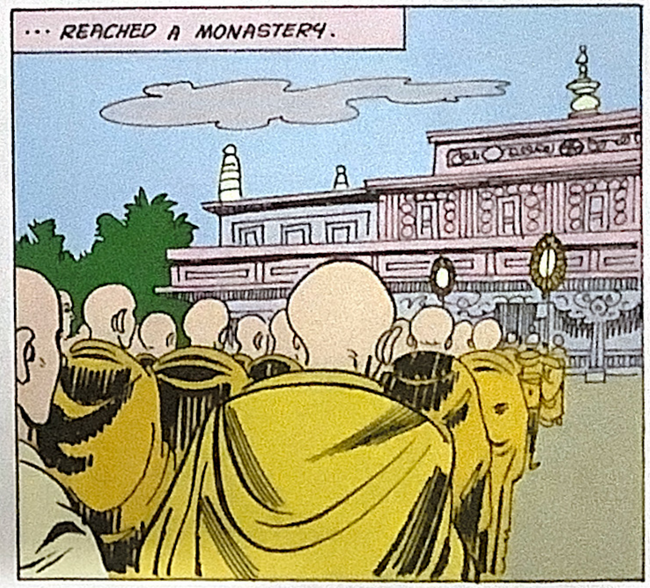

MY FEET HURT WITH SO MUCH WALKING WHEN SHALL WE FINALLY REACH THE HOLY LAND?
WE MUST NOT LOSE HEART.

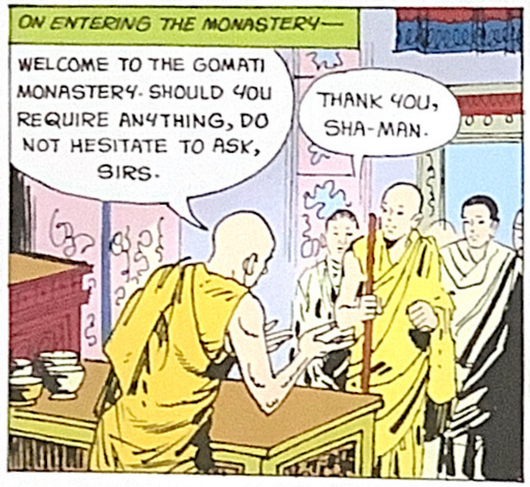

OVERCOMING INDESCRIBABLE HARDSHIP THEY REACHED THE CITY OF KHOTEN.
THIS APPEARS TO BE A PLEASANT CITY.

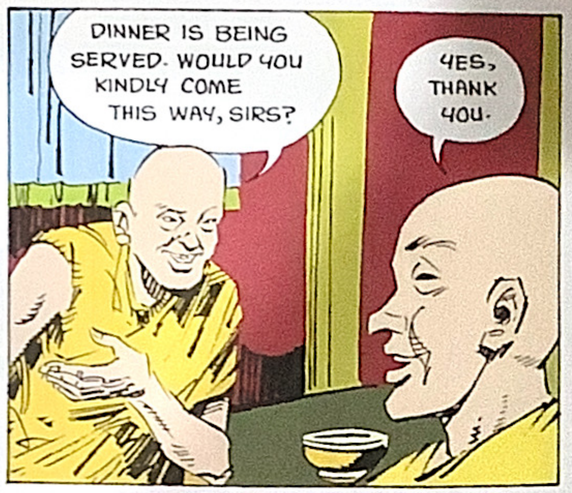
LOOK THERE!

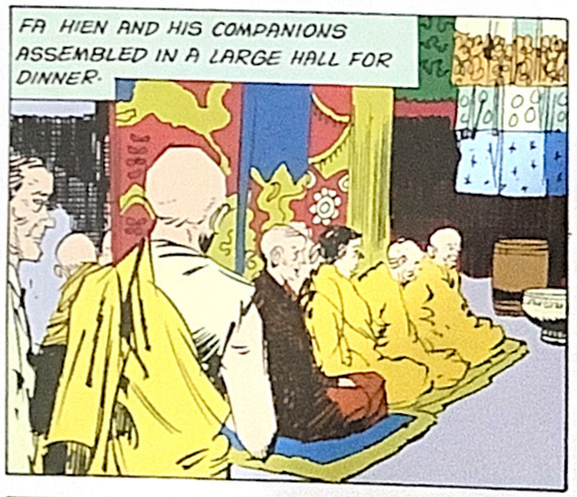
OH, OH, THAT'S THE KING HIMSELF!

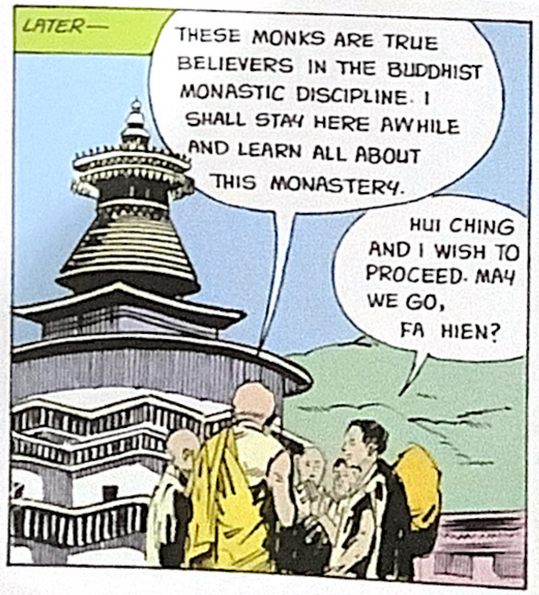

FA HIEN AND HIS FRIENDS JOINED THE PROCESSION AND···

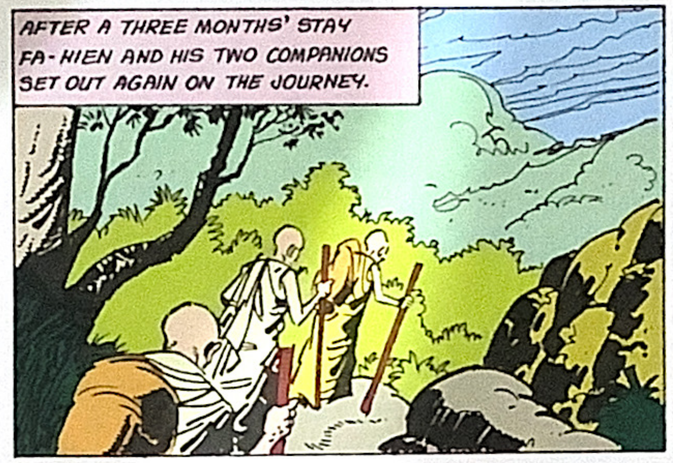

··· REACHED A MONASTERY.

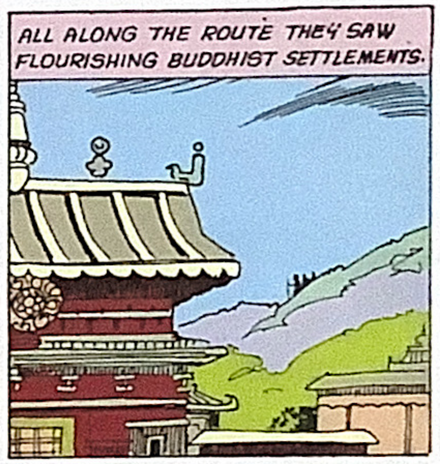


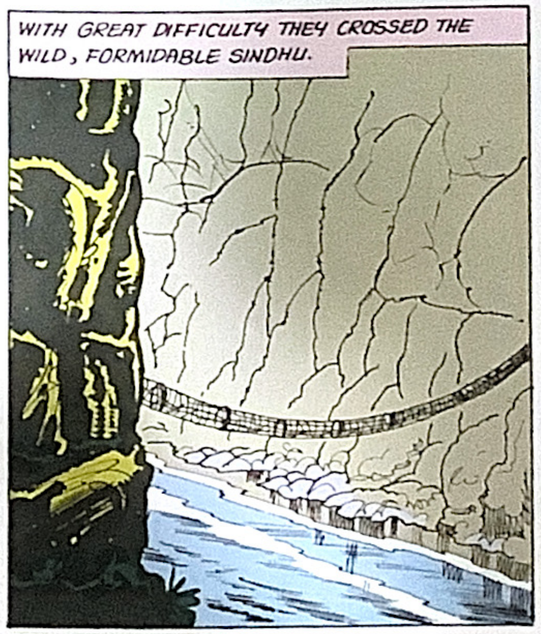


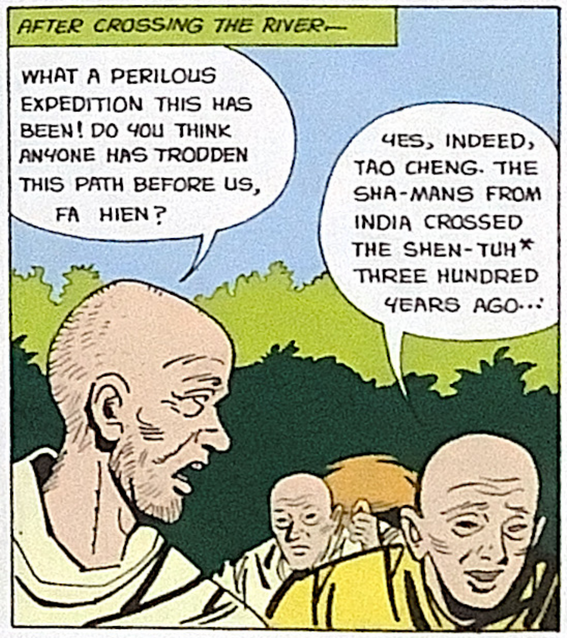




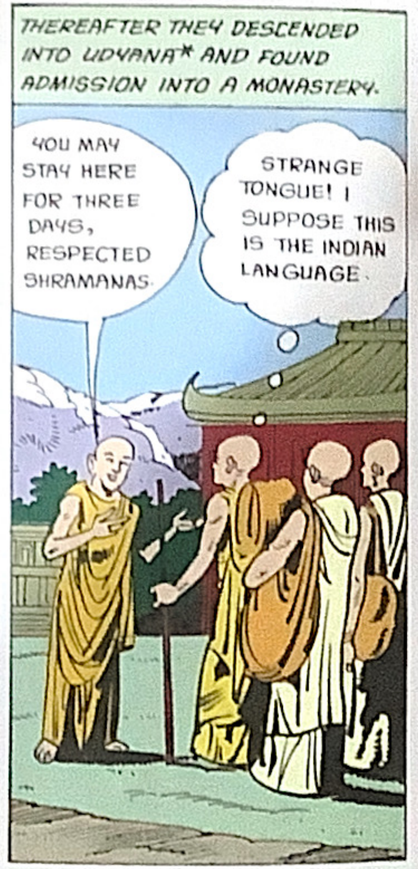


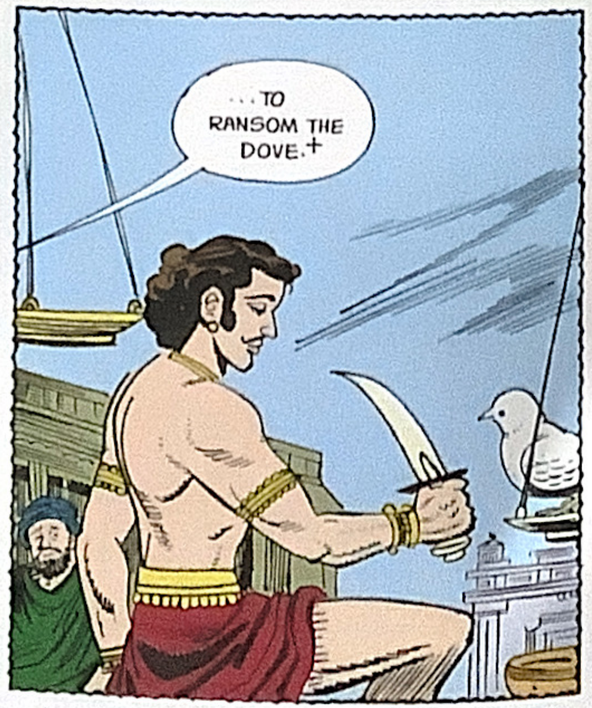






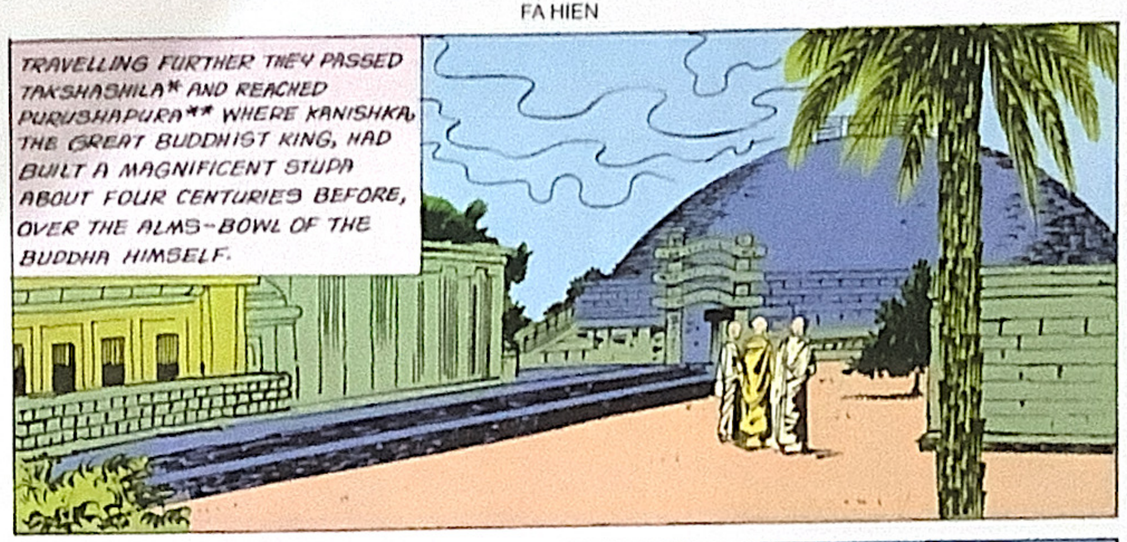
* The Hindu Kush Ranges

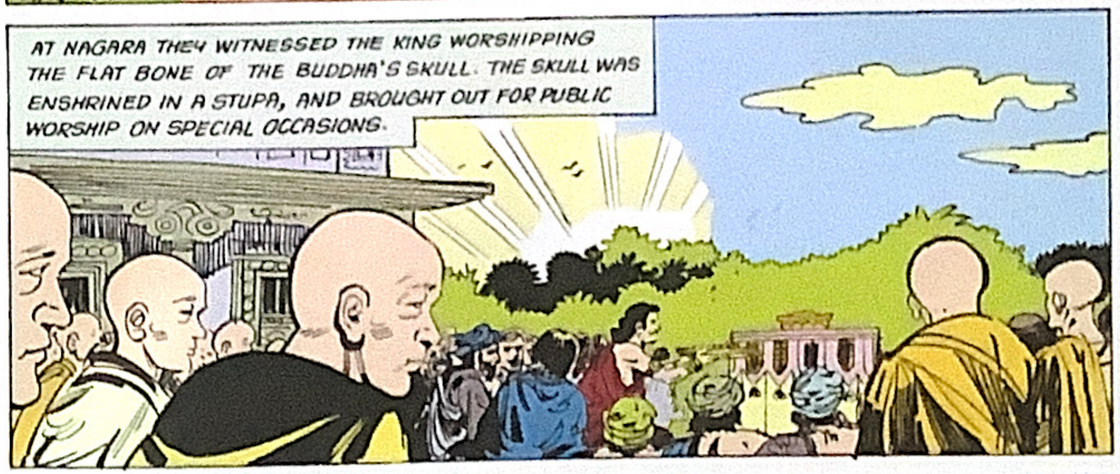


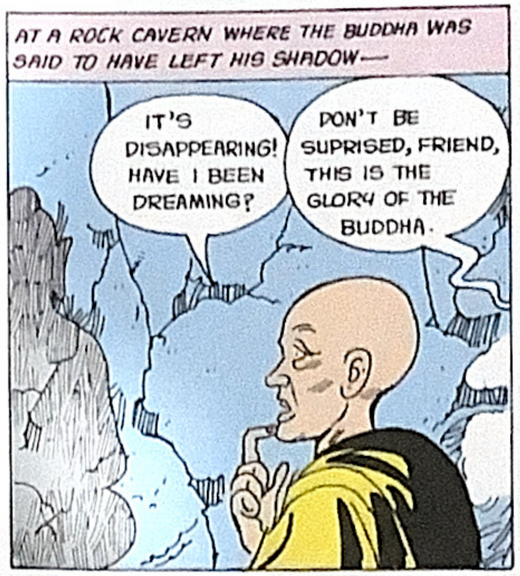


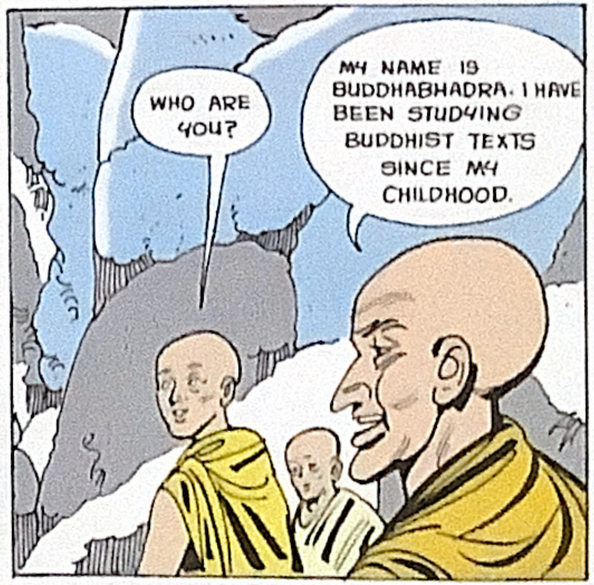
* Swat in North Pakistan

† The story of Indra and Shibi. Shibi is referred to as Bodhisattva See ACK No.524

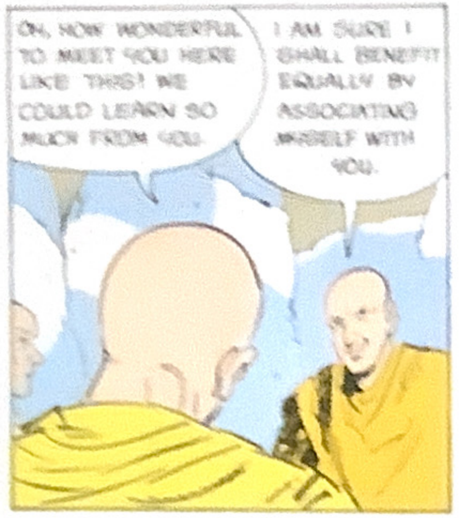


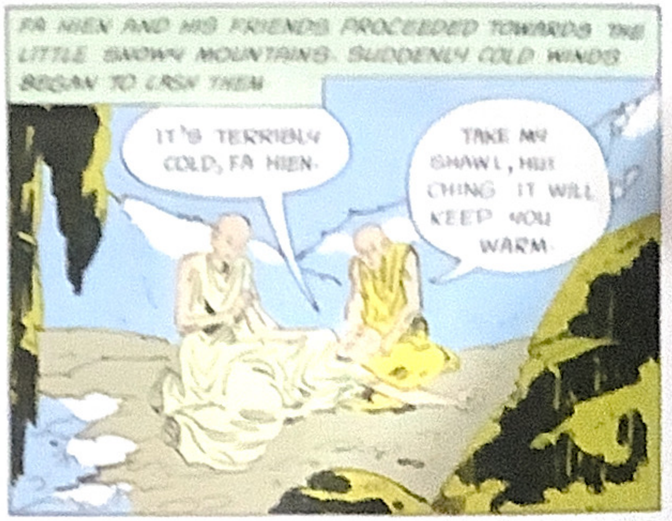


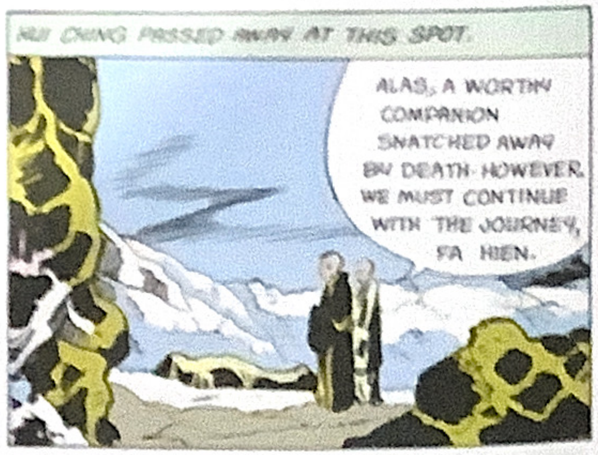


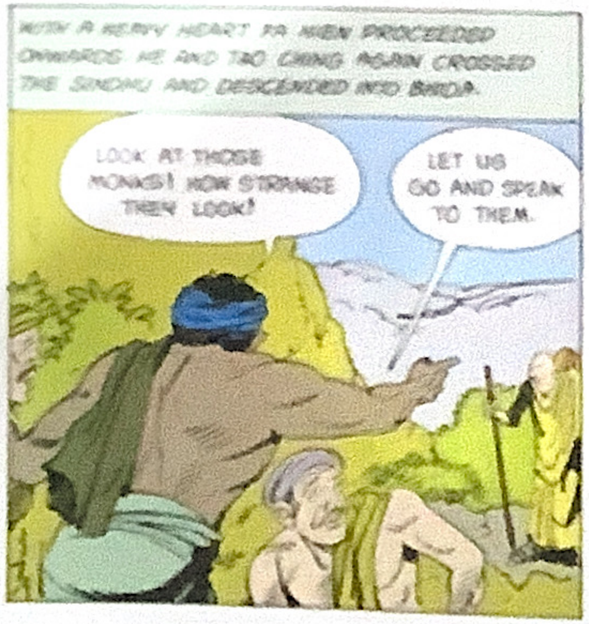


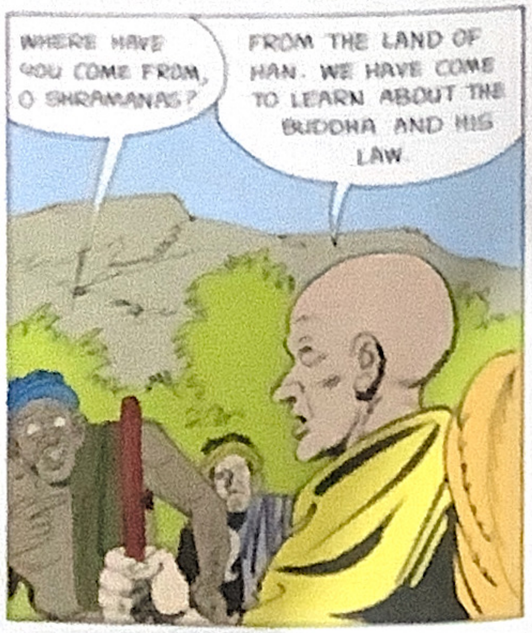
* Taxila in Pakistan ** Peshawar

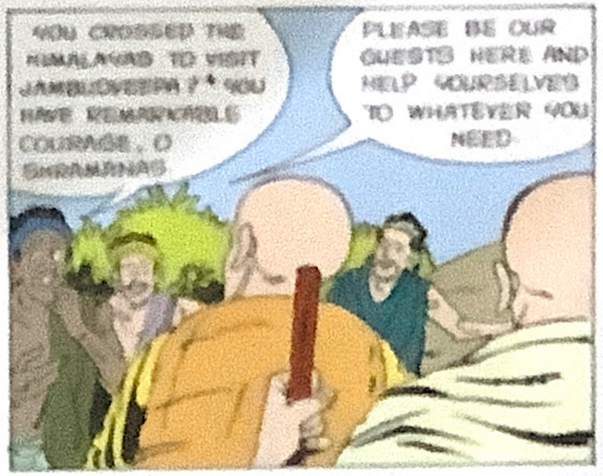


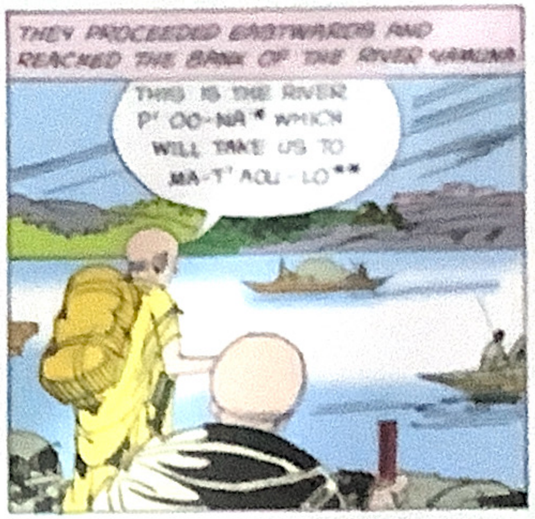


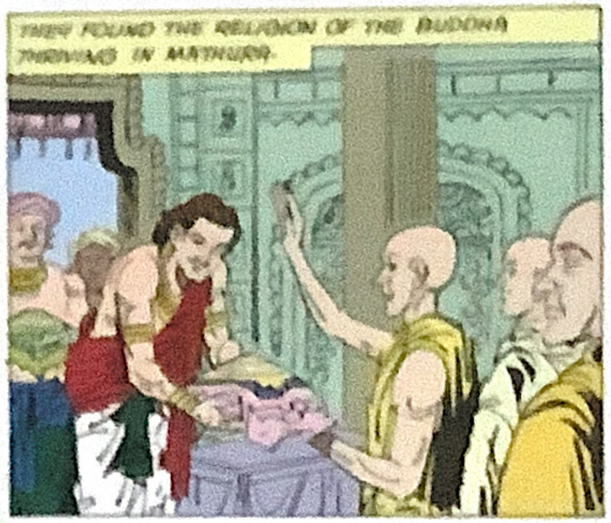


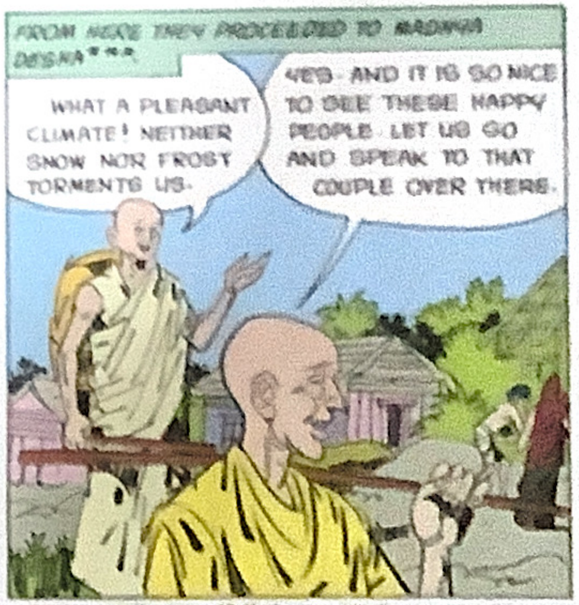












* India * Yamuna ** Mathura *** Present day U.P. and parts of M.P.

INSIDE THE HOUSE—

A COZY HOUSE YOU HAVE, SIR. WHO ARE YOU BUILDING THE OTHER ONE FOR?

FOR MYSELF. WHO ELSE?

REALLY? YOU ARE ALLOWED TO OWN TWO HOUSES?

OF COURSE. AS MANY AS YOU WANT.

DOESN'T THE REGISTRAR OBJECT?

WHAT REGISTRAR? WE DON'T HAVE TO REGISTER ANYWHERE. IT'S A FREE COUNTRY.

OH, I SEE. AND WHO DOES ALL THIS LAND BELONG TO? THE KING?

NO, SIR, IT'S MINE. ALL OF IT.

IN THAT CASE, YOU MUST BE PAYING HIM A PORTION OF THE HARVEST AS TAX.

ON MY LAND? WHY SHOULD I? IF IT WAS HIS LAND I WOULD PAY ALL RIGHT.

AND WHAT IF YOU DON'T?

THEN THEY CHARGE A FINE.

ONLY A FINE FOR TAX EVASION? AND WHAT ABOUT PUNISHMENT FOR OTHER CRIMES?

WE PEOPLE BELIEVE THAT CRIMES ARE COMMITTED BY MEN WHO ARE ONLY HUMAN. YOU CAN'T HOPE TO REFORM THEM...

...BY BEING INHUMAN. AND OUR KINGS BELIEVE THAT TOO. THEY PUNISH A TRAITOR BY CUTTING OFF HIS RIGHT HAND.

SUDDENLY THERE WAS A COMMOTION IN THE STREET.

TAT TAT

MAKE WAY, MAKE WAY, SIRS, LET THESE CHANDALAS PASS.

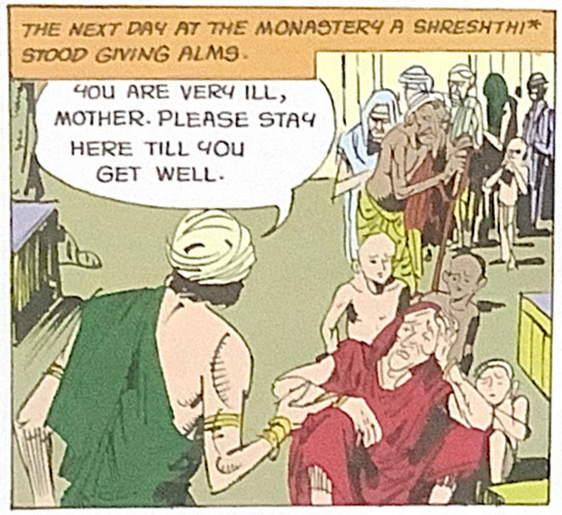
WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE?

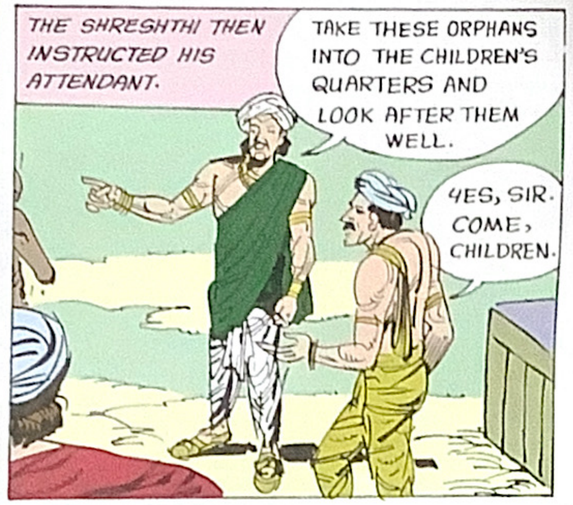
THEY ARE THE PEOPLE OF THE LOWEST CASTE. YOU MUST AVOID CONTACT WITH THEM, SIR.

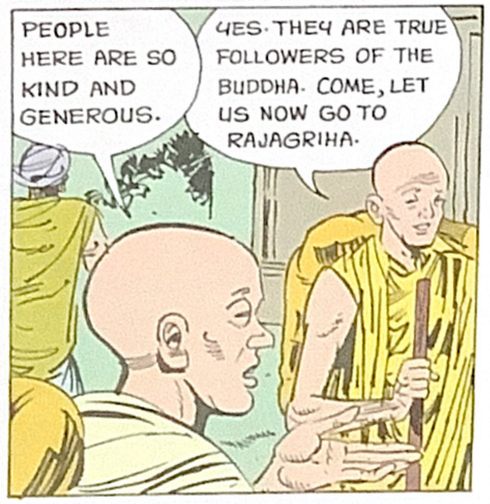
WELL, NICE TO KNOW YOU, SIR. COULD YOU LEAD US TO THE LOCAL MONASTERY, PLEASE?

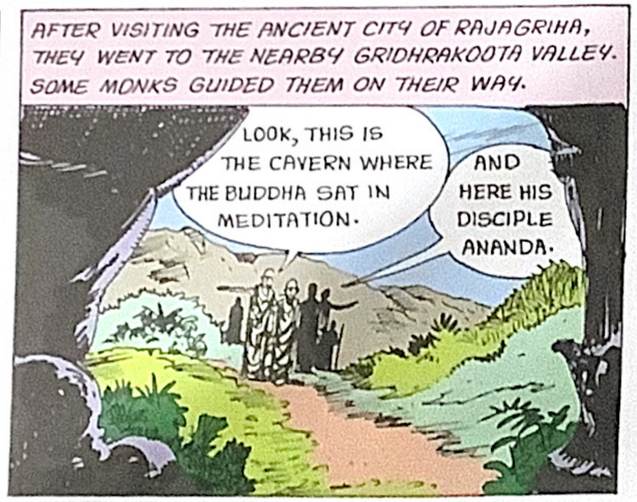
WITH PLEASURE, SIR. PLEASE COME THIS WAY.

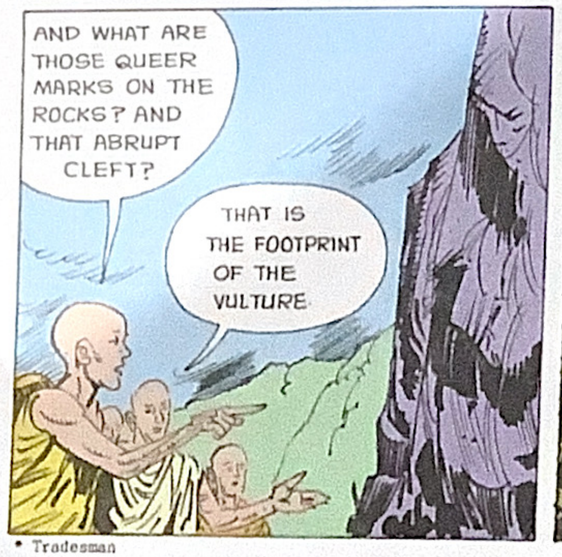
YOU WERE ENTRUSTED WITH THE ENTIRETY OF THE MAHAYANA.
YOU ARE ENDOWED OF SHAKYAMUNI'S THREE STUPA FOR NIRVANA UNLIMITED THREE JEWELS.



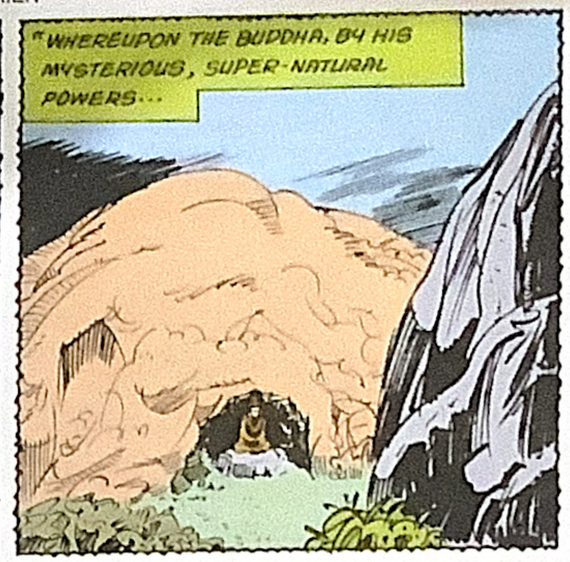


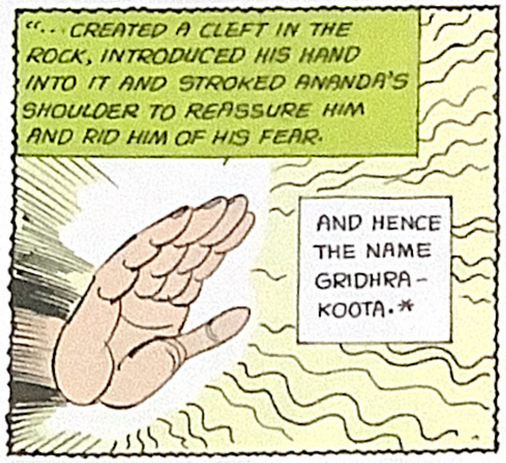


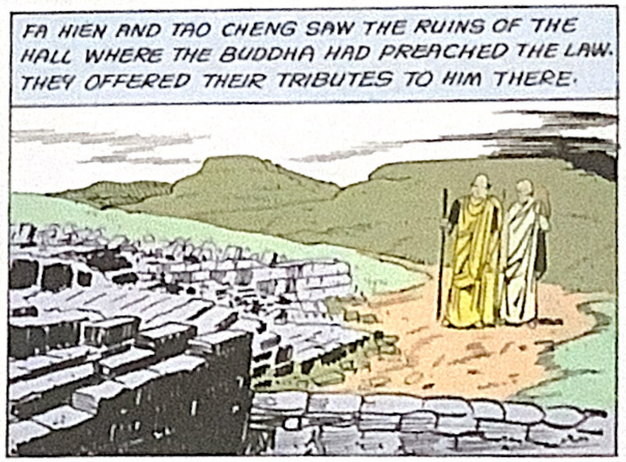


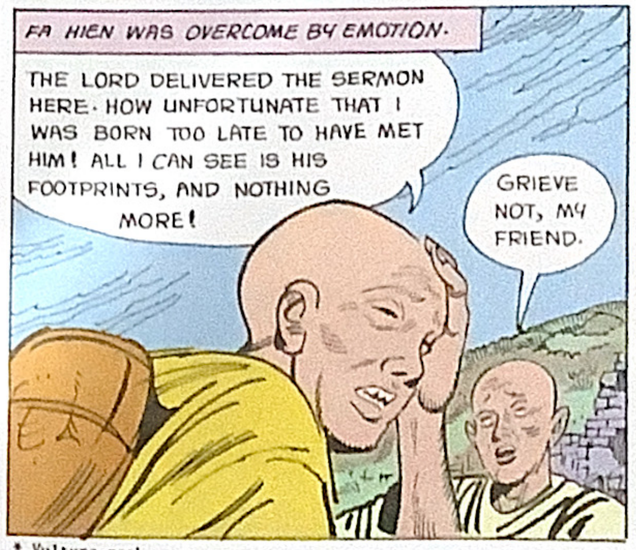


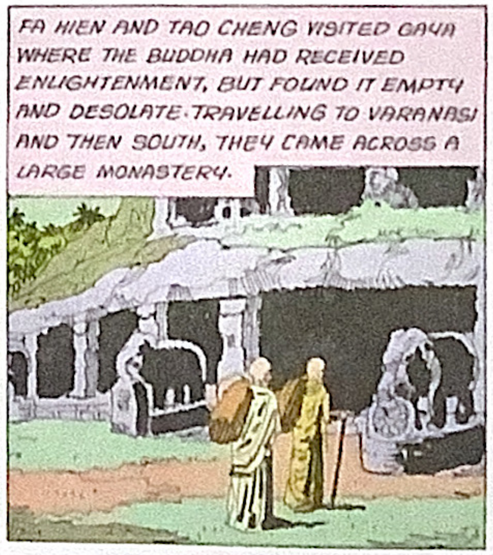
* Tradesman



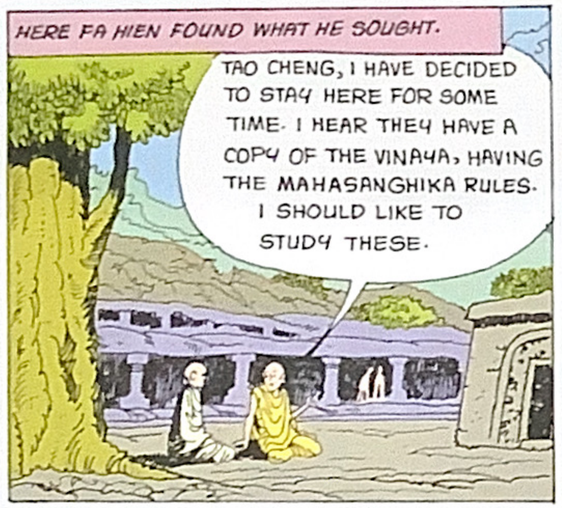


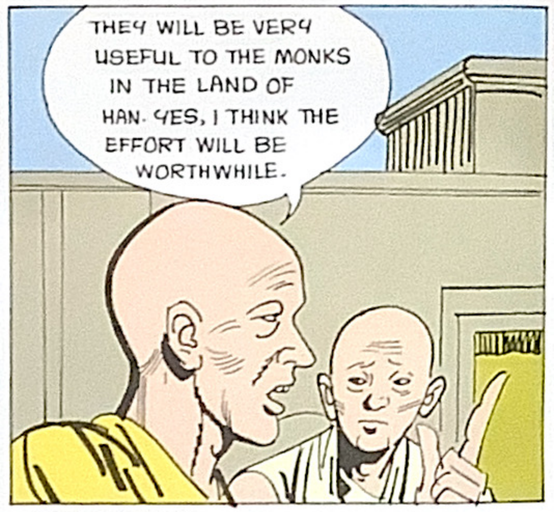


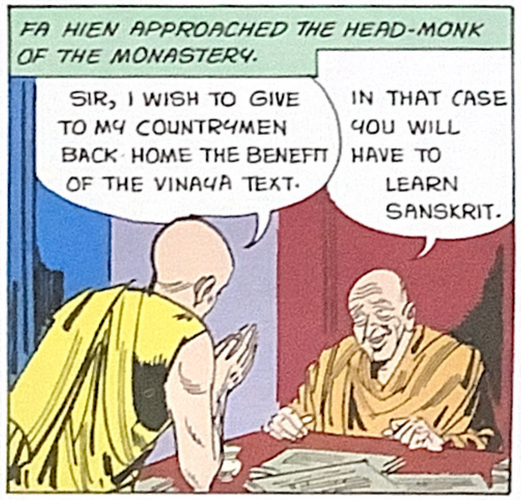


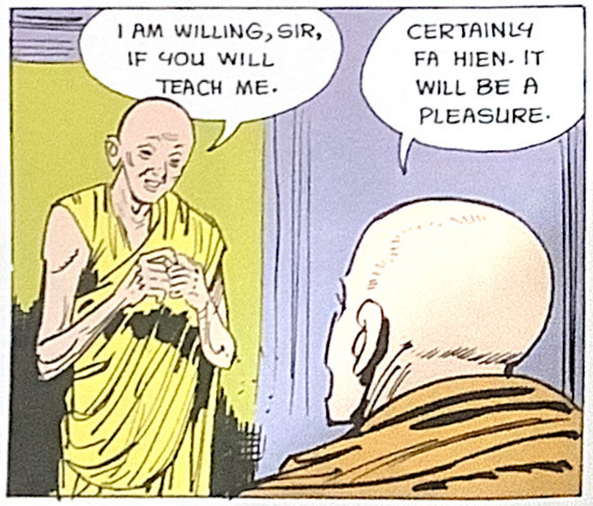


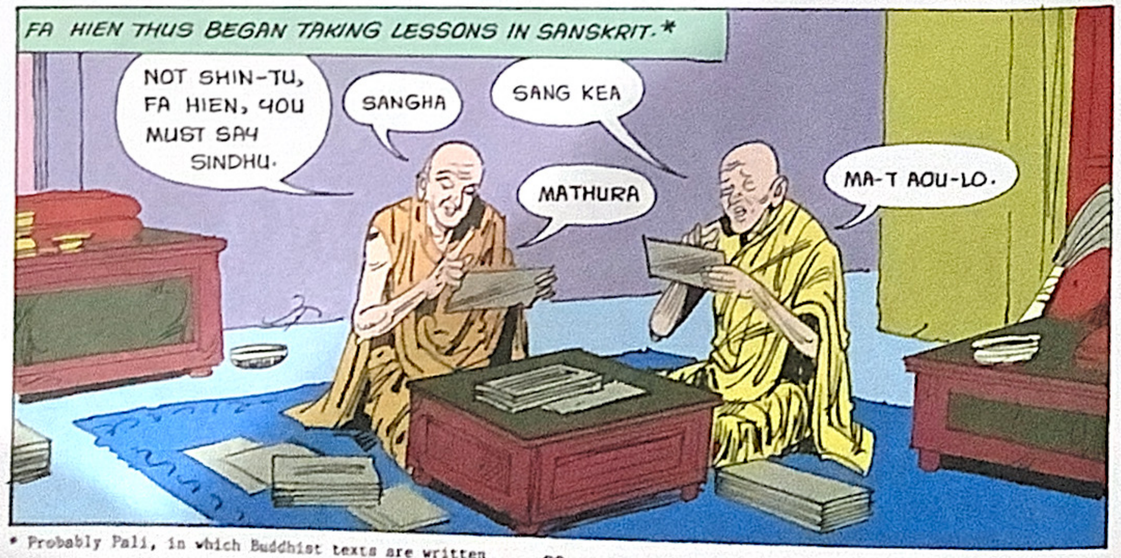
* Vulture-peak



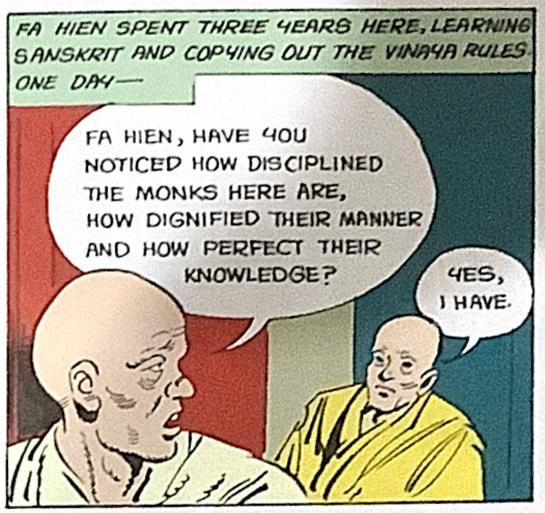


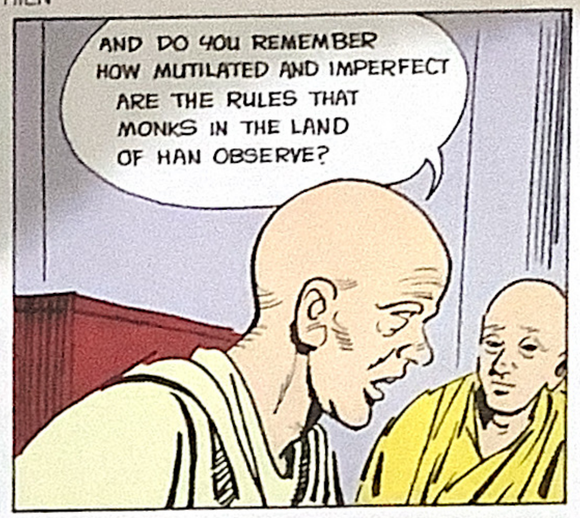


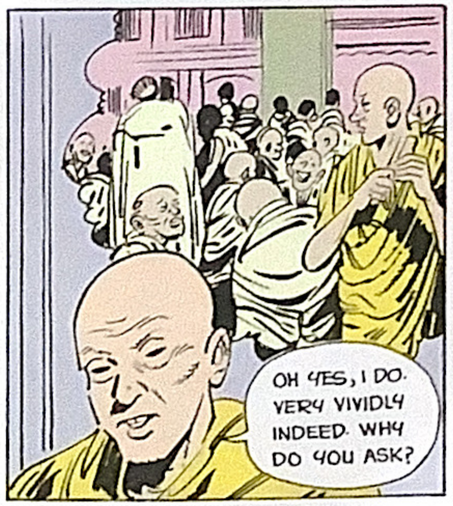


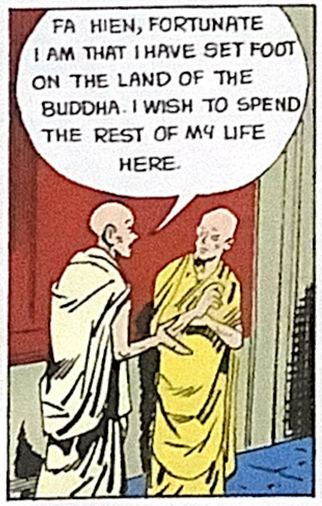


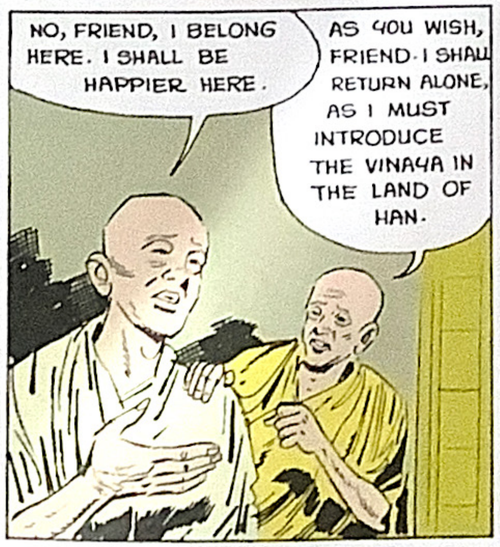
* Probably Pali, in which Buddhist texts are written

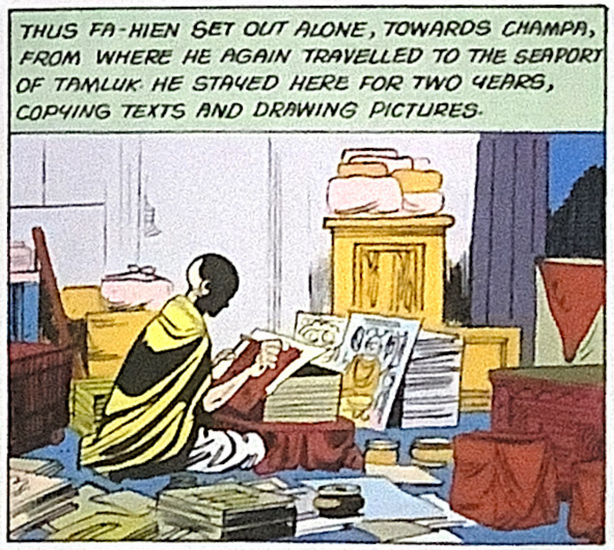




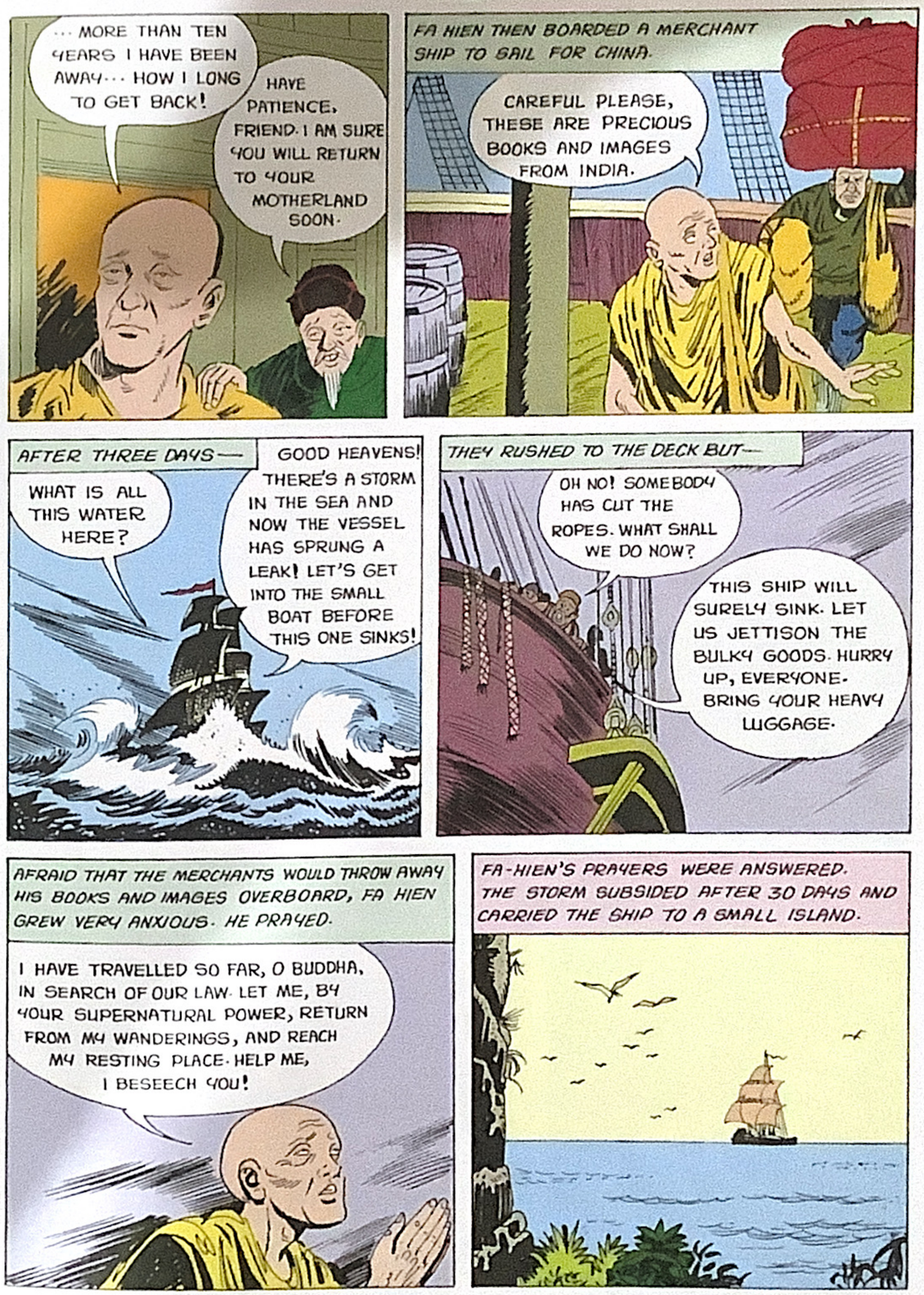


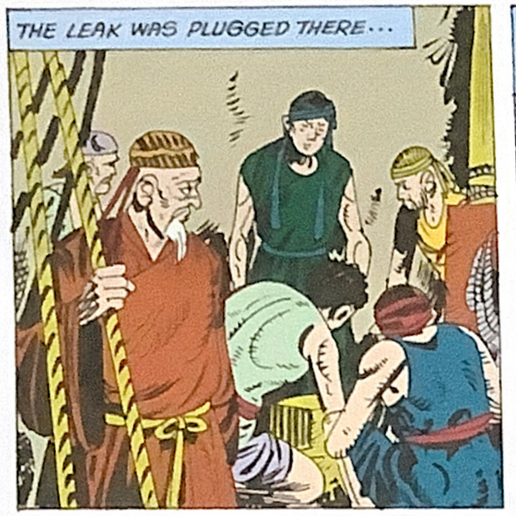


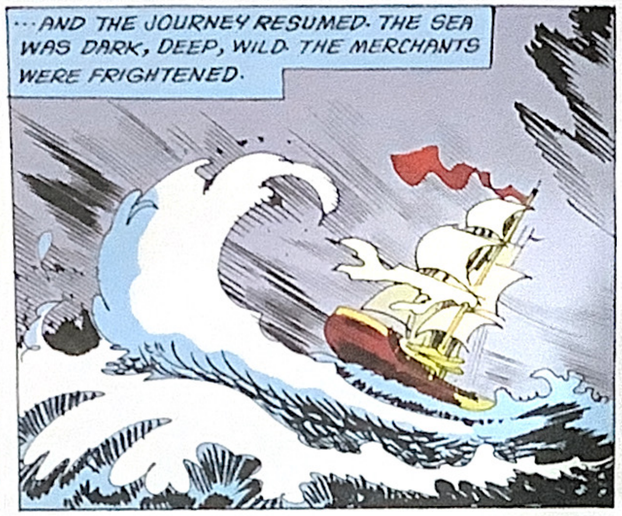


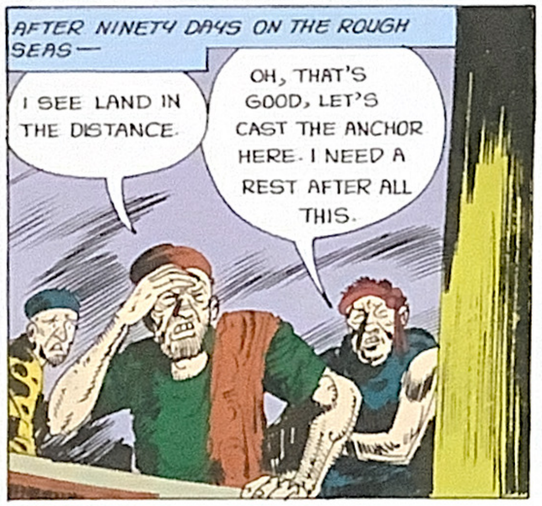


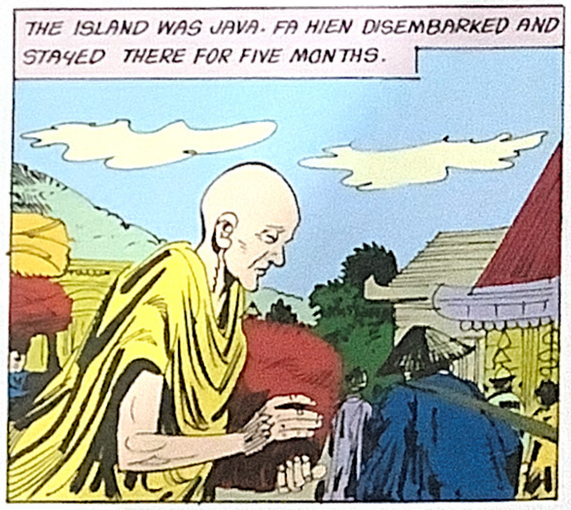
* Now Sri Lanka

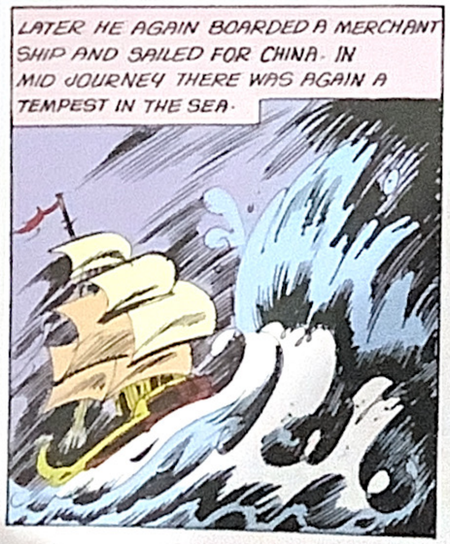


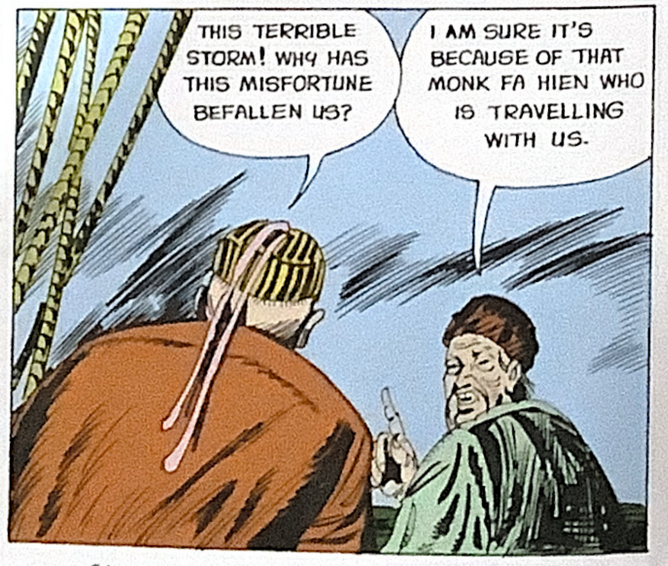

THE LEAK WAS PLUGGED THERE...


...AND THE JOURNEY RESUMED. THE SEA WAS DARK, DEEP, WILD. THE MERCHANTS WERE FRIGHTENED.


AFTER NINETY DAYS ON THE ROUGH SEAS—
I SEE LAND IN THE DISTANCE.
OH, THAT'S GOOD, LET'S CAST THE ANCHOR HERE. I NEED A REST AFTER ALL THIS.

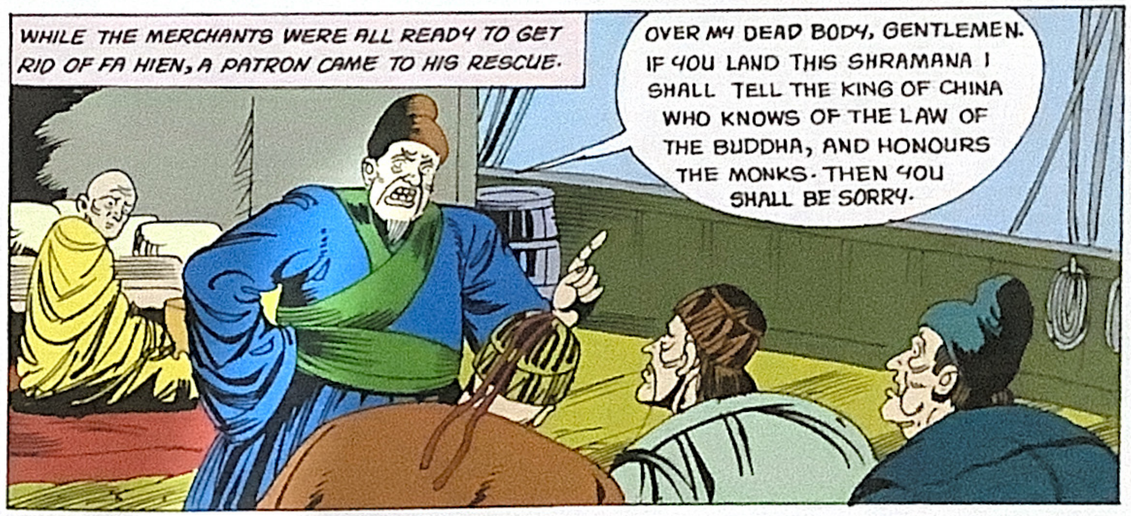

THE ISLAND WAS JAVA. FA HIEN DISEMBARKED AND STAYED THERE FOR FIVE MONTHS.

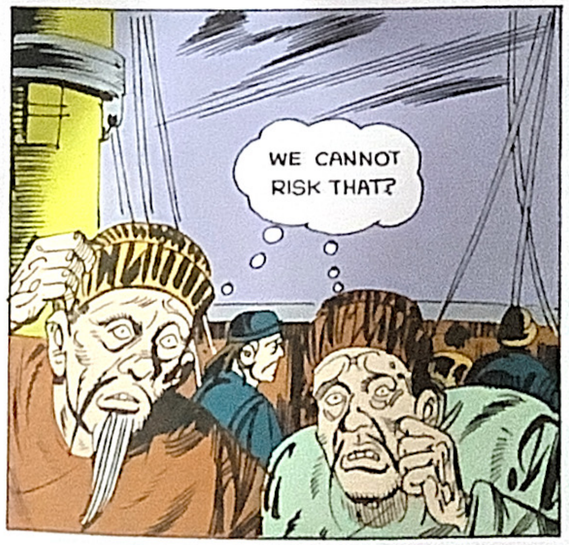

LATER HE AGAIN BOARDED A MERCHANT SHIP AND SAILED FOR CHINA. IN MID JOURNEY THERE WAS AGAIN A TEMPEST IN THE SEA.

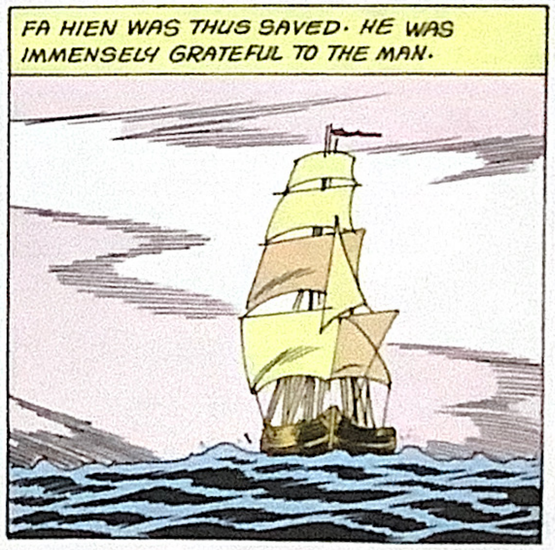

THIS TERRIBLE STORM! WHY HAS THIS MISFORTUNE BEFALLEN US?
I AM SURE IT'S BECAUSE OF THAT MONK FA HIEN WHO IS TRAVELLING WITH US.

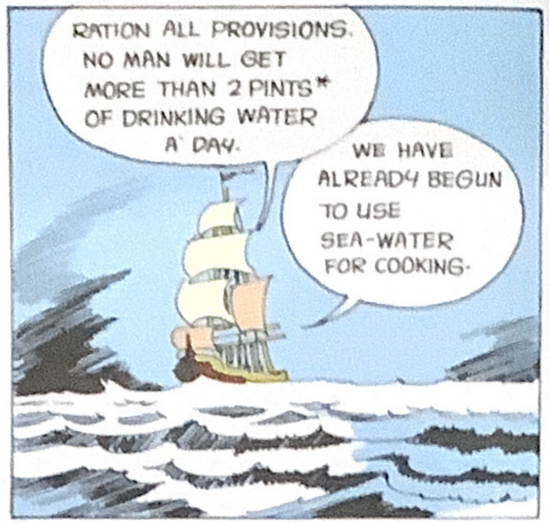
YES, YES. I'M CERTAIN HE IS THE CAUSE OF IT. LET'S THROW HIM ASHORE AS WE SIGHT LAND AGAIN AND PROCEED.

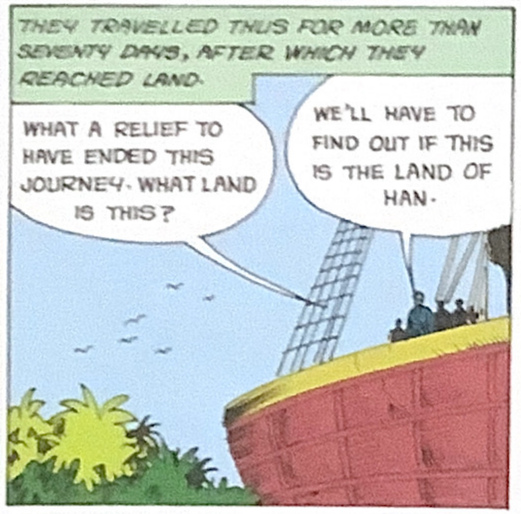
WHY ME?

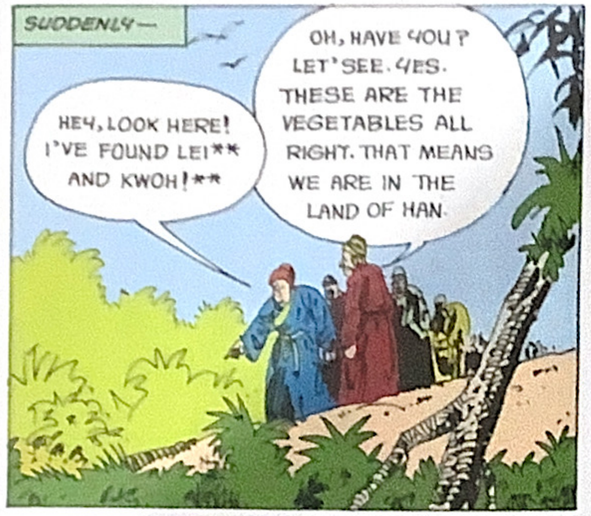

WHILE THE MERCHANTS WERE ALL READY TO GET RID OF FA HIEN, A PATRON CAME TO HIS RESCUE.
OVER MY DEAD BODY, GENTLEMEN. IF YOU LAND THIS SHRAMANA I SHALL TELL THE KING OF CHINA WHO KNOWS OF THE LAW OF THE BUDDHA, AND HONOURS THE MONKS. THEN YOU SHALL BE SORRY.

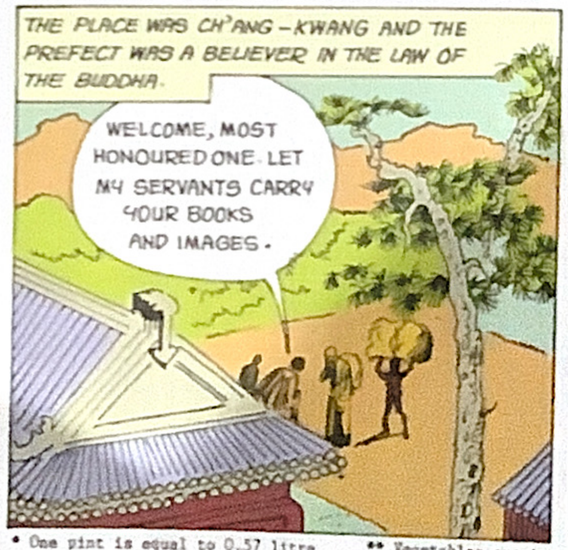

WE CANNOT RISK THAT?

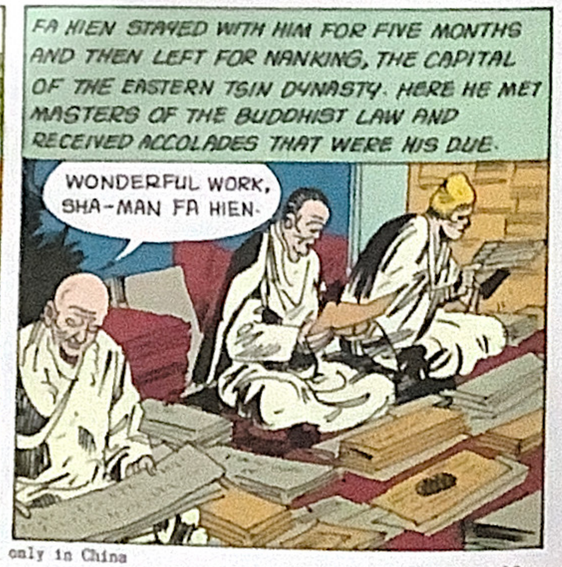

FA HIEN WAS THUS SAVED. HE WAS IMMENSELY GRATEFUL TO THE MAN.





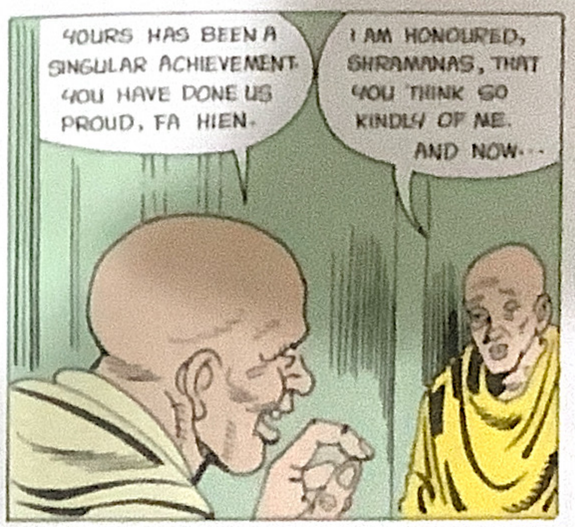


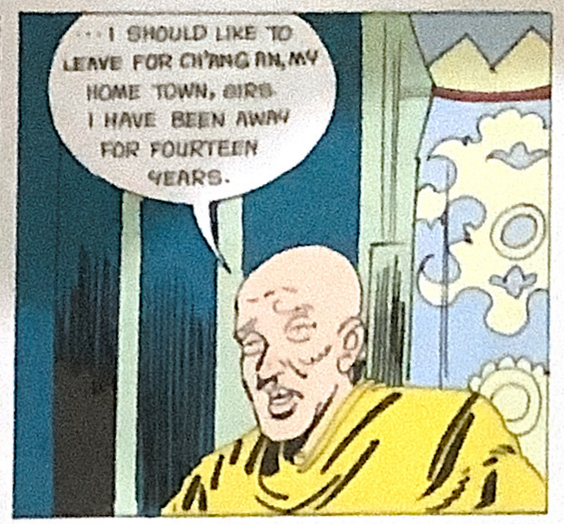


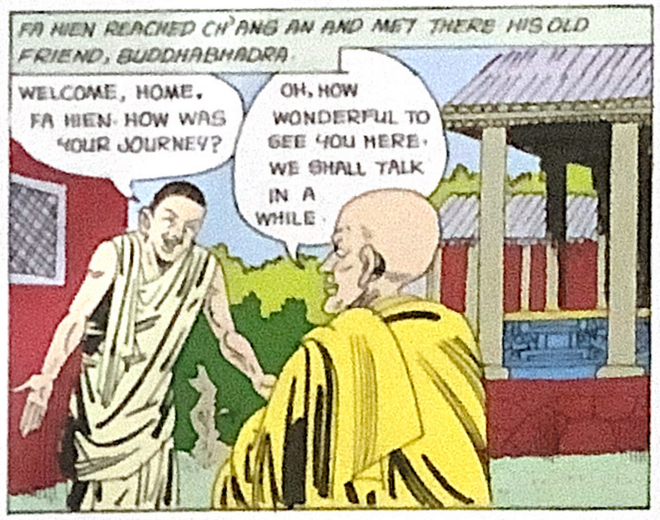


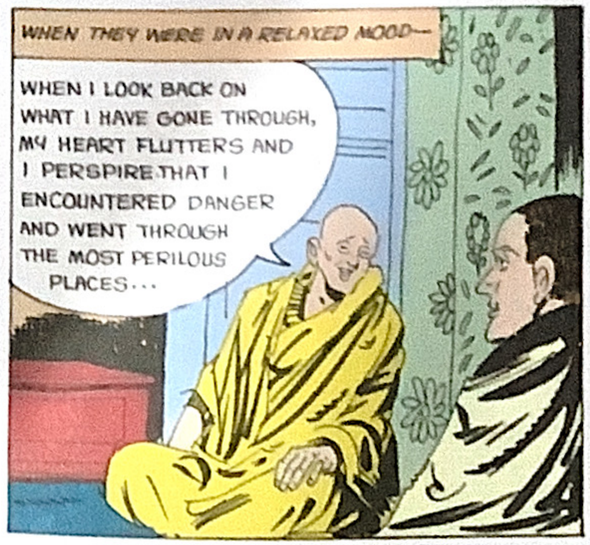
* One pint is equal to 0.57 litre

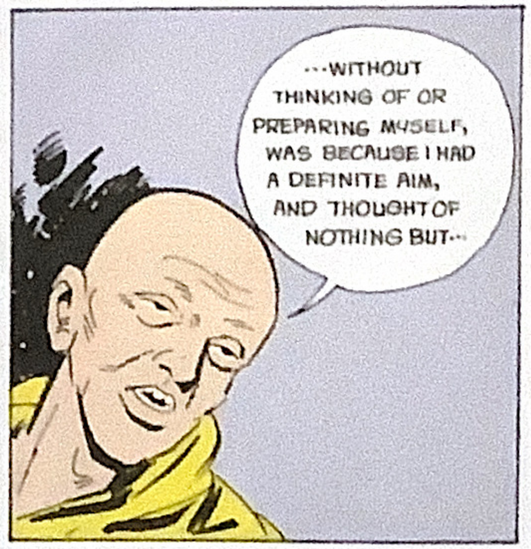
** Vegetables growing only in China





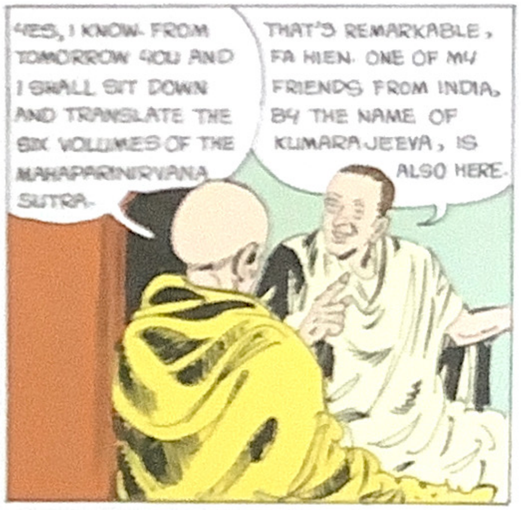


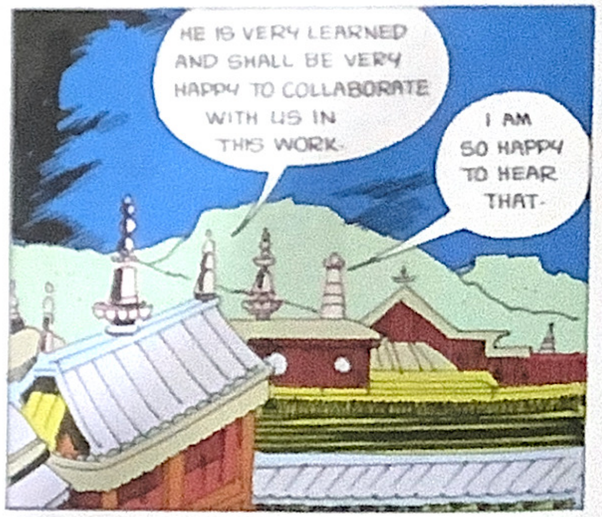


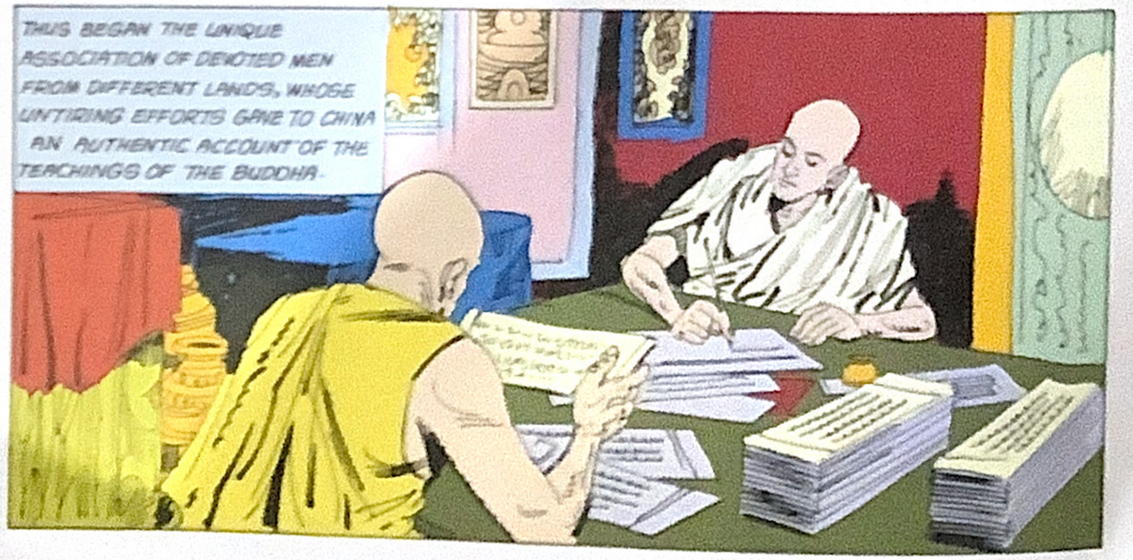


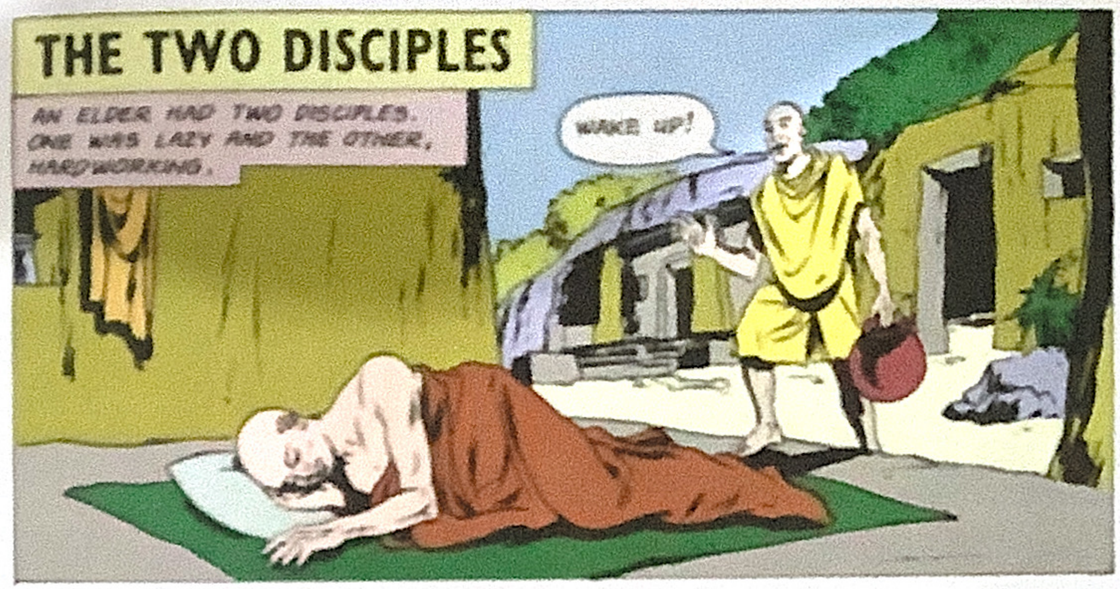
YOURS HAS BEEN A NOBLE MISSION, FA HIEN. BUT FOR YOU THE LAND OF HAN WOULD NOT HAVE KNOWN THE VINAYA TEXTS...

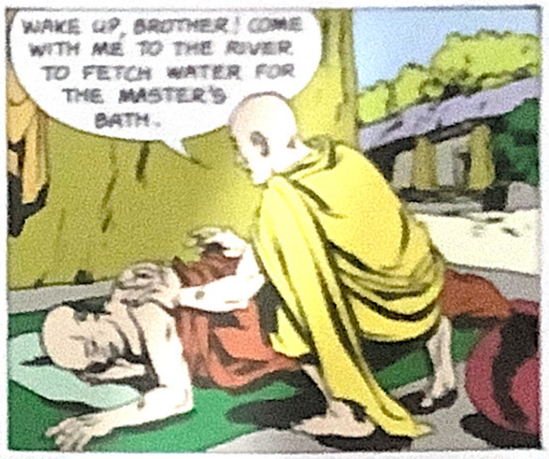
...BUT THERE IS MORE TO BE DONE, FRIEND


YES, I KNOW. FROM TOMORROW YOU AND I SHALL SIT DOWN AND TRANSLATE THE SIX VOLUMES OF THE MAHAPARINIRVANA SUTRA.
THAT'S REMARKABLE, FA HIEN. ONE OF MY FRIENDS FROM INDIA, BY THE NAME OF KUMARAJEEVA, IS ALSO HERE.

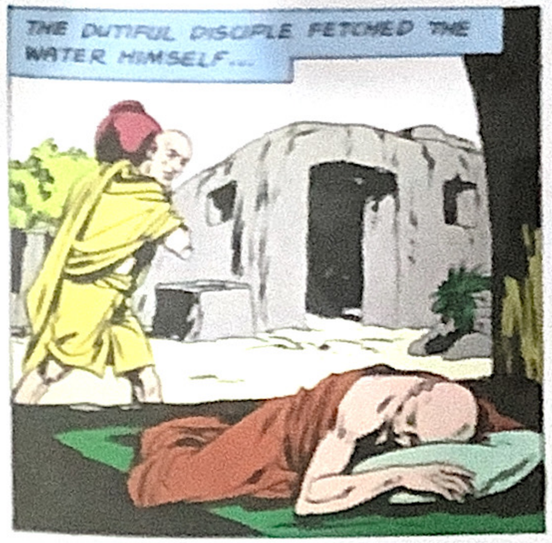

HE IS VERY LEARNED AND SHALL BE VERY HAPPY TO COLLABORATE WITH US IN THIS WORK.
I AM SO HAPPY TO HEAR THAT.

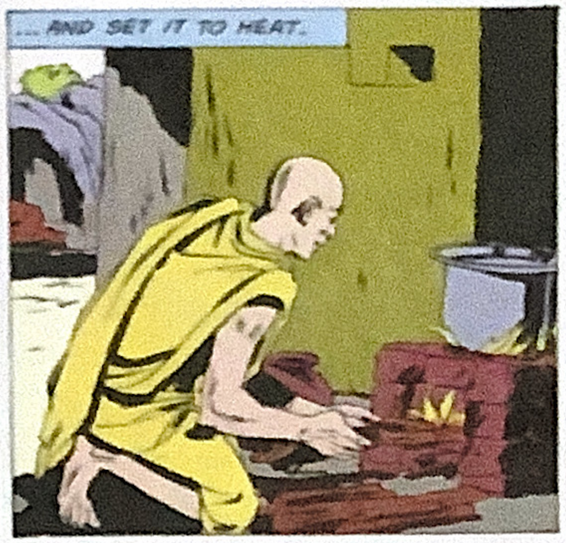

THUS BEGAN THE UNIQUE ASSOCIATION OF DEVOTED MEN FROM DIFFERENT LANDS, WHOSE UNTIRING EFFORTS GAVE TO CHINA AN AUTHENTIC ACCOUNT OF THE TEACHINGS OF THE BUDDHA.

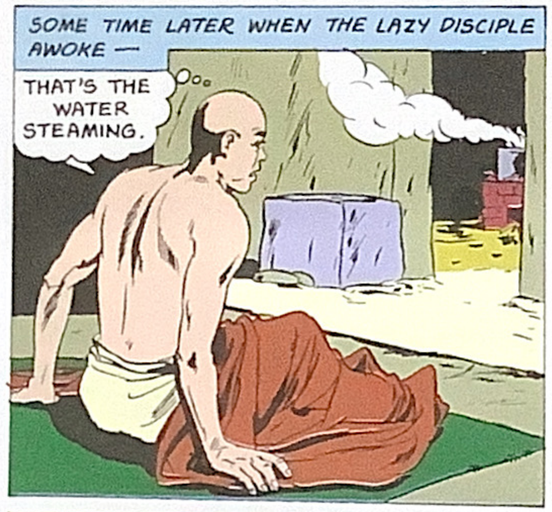

THE TWO DISCIPLES
AN ELDER HAD TWO DISCIPLES. ONE WAS LAZY AND THE OTHER, HARDWORKING.
WAKE UP!


WAKE UP, BROTHER! COME WITH ME TO THE RIVER TO FETCH WATER FOR THE MASTER'S BATH.

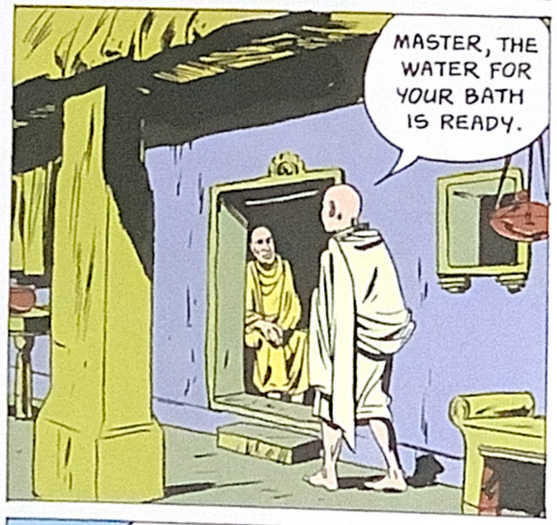
OH, HE SLEEPS LIKE A LOG!

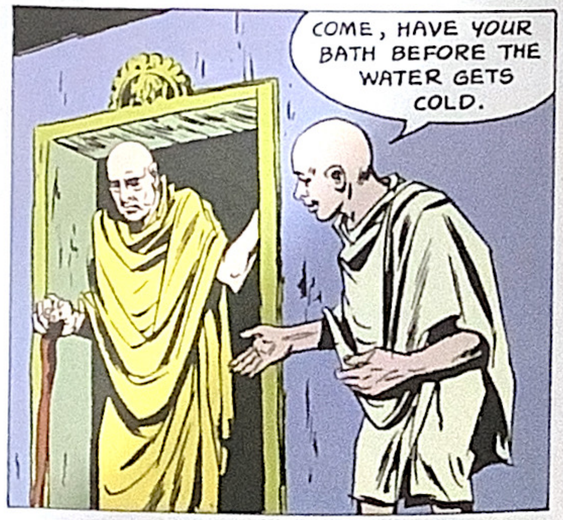

THE DUTIFUL DISCIPLE FETCHED THE WATER HIMSELF...

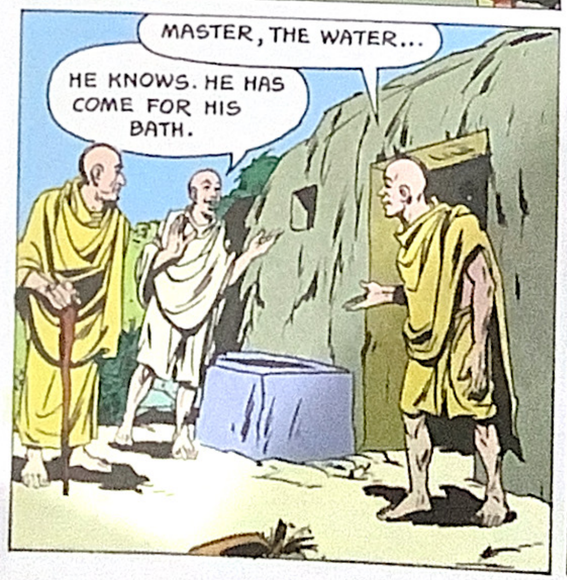

...AND SET IT TO HEAT.

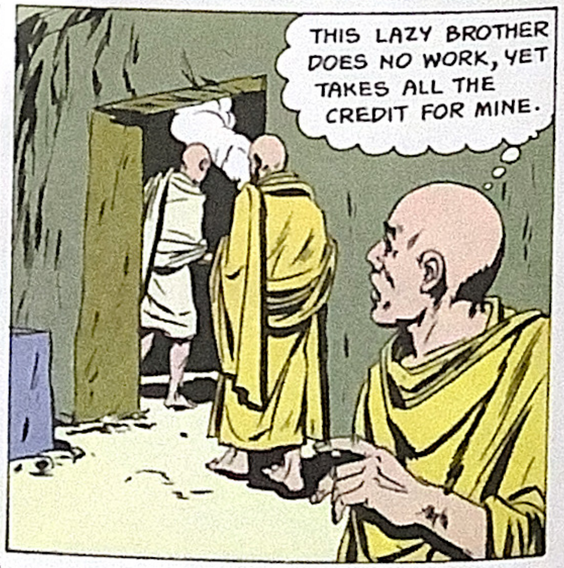

SOME TIME LATER WHEN THE LAZY DISCIPLE AWOKE —
THAT'S THE WATER STEAMING.

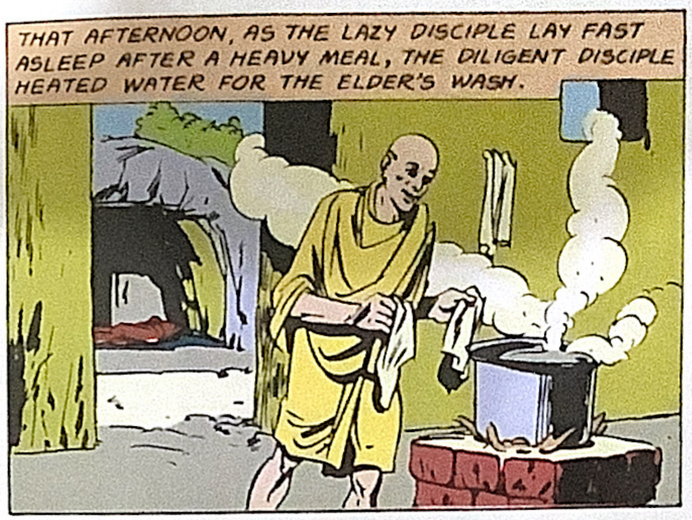
TIME TO GO TO THE MASTER.

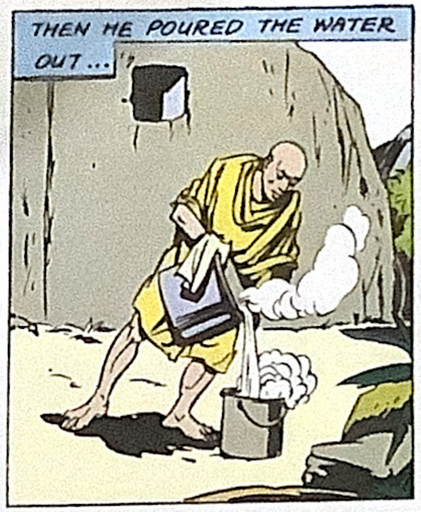

MASTER, THE WATER FOR YOUR BATH IS READY.

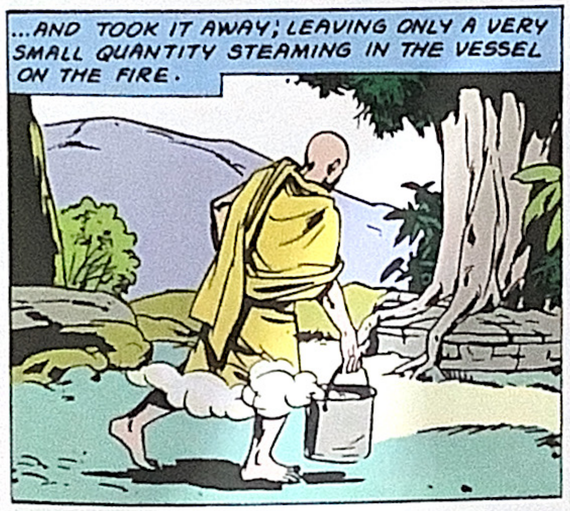

COME, HAVE YOUR BATH BEFORE THE WATER GETS COLD.

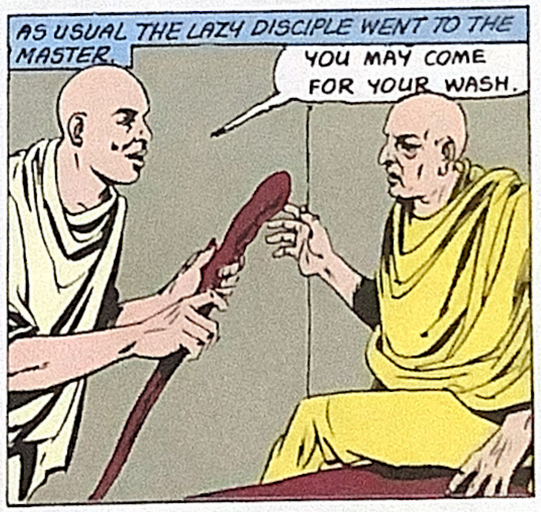

MASTER, THE WATER...
HE KNOWS. HE HAS COME FOR HIS BATH.

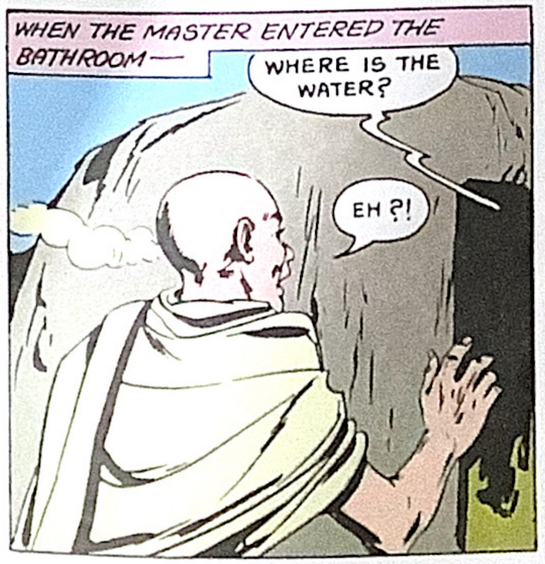

THIS LAZY BROTHER DOES NO WORK, YET TAKES ALL THE CREDIT FOR MINE.

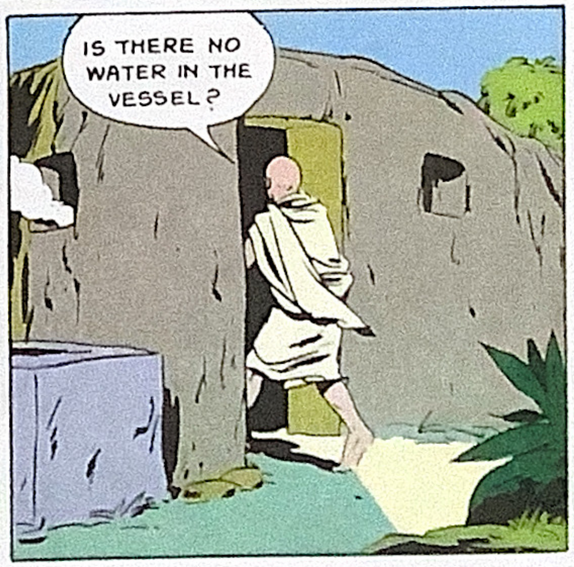

THAT AFTERNOON, AS THE LAZY DISCIPLE LAY FAST ASLEEP AFTER A HEAVY MEAL, THE DILIGENT DISCIPLE HEATED WATER FOR THE ELDER'S WASH.

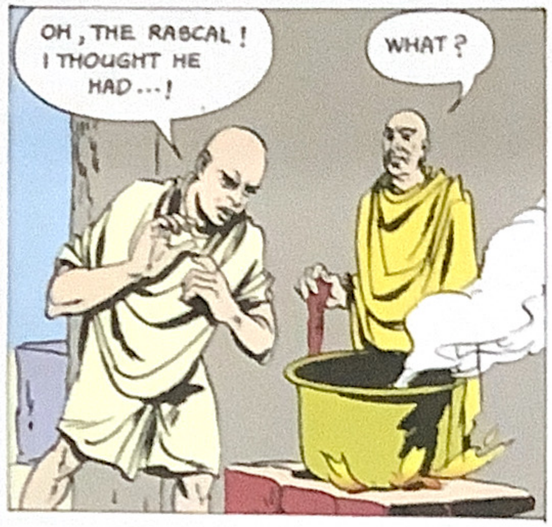

THEN HE POURED THE WATER OUT...

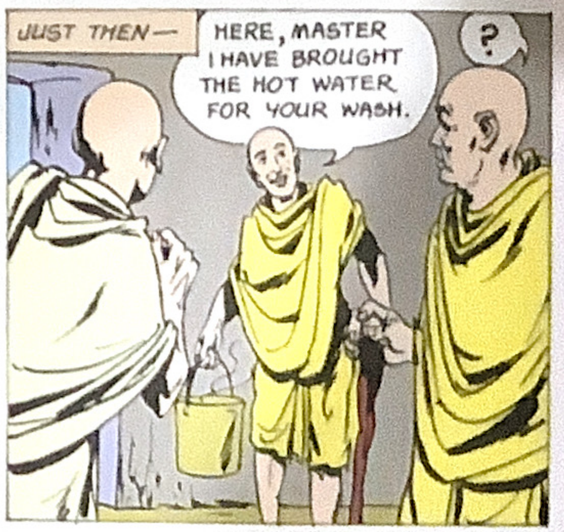

...AND TOOK IT AWAY; LEAVING ONLY A VERY SMALL QUANTITY STEAMING IN THE VESSEL ON THE FIRE.

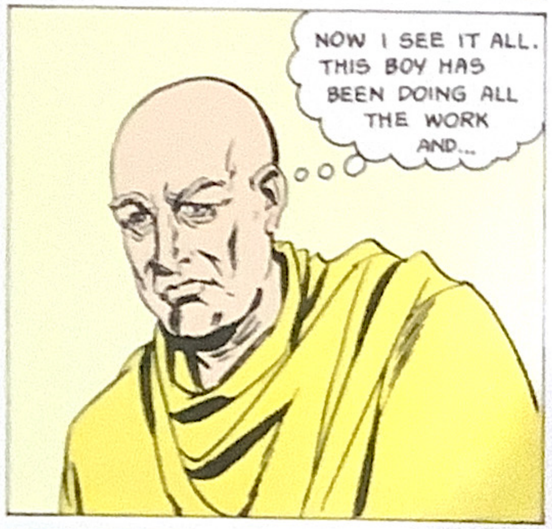

AS USUAL THE LAZY DISCIPLE WENT TO THE MASTER.
YOU MAY COME FOR YOUR WASH.

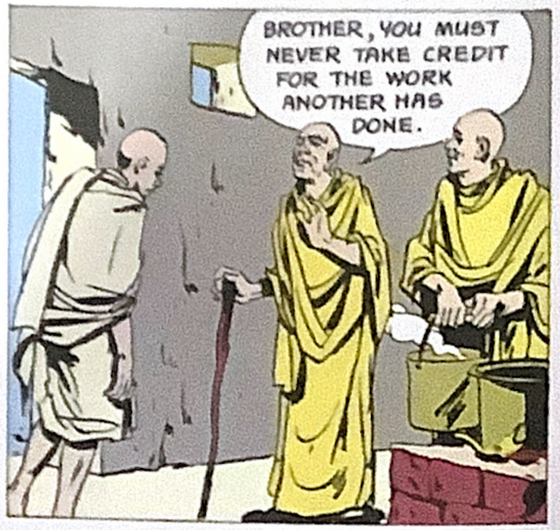

WHEN THE MASTER ENTERED THE BATHROOM—
WHERE IS THE WATER?
EH ?!

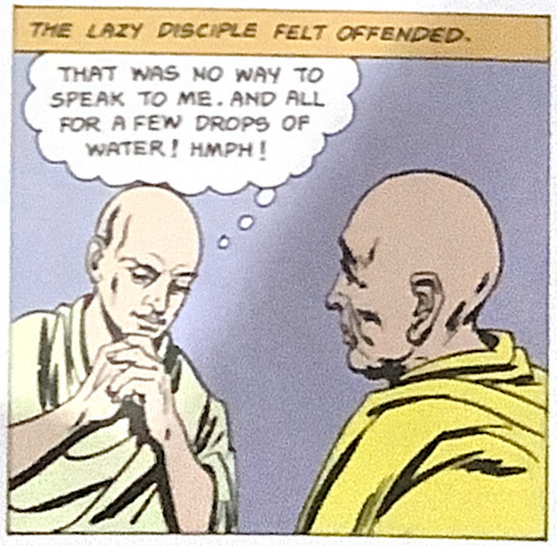

IS THERE NO WATER IN THE VESSEL?

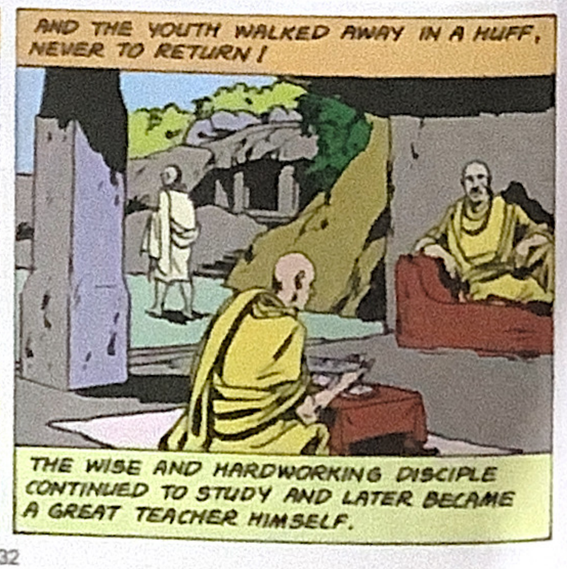












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